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Social Media and Development of Tourism in Manipur

Dr. Achom Roshan Kumar

Associate Professor, Dept. of Sociology, G.P. Women's College, Imphal, Manipur, India

Dr. R.K.Helen Devi

Associate Professor and HOD, Dept. of Sociology, G.P. Women's College, Imphal, Manipur, India

Dr. Chingangbam Newgold Devi

Assistant Professor, Dept. of Sociology, G.P. Women's College, Imphal, Manipur, India

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Abstract

This article explores the potential role of social media in the development of tourism in Manipur, which is a landlocked state in the far north-eastern corner of India. The advent of smartphones, the internet, and social media applications in the 2000s has brought about unprecedented changes in the way people communicate, work, and entertain. By 2025, the number of social media user identities in the world is estimated to be 5.24 billion people, which equates to 63.9 percent of all the people on Earth. Such an explosive growth of social media provides a huge opportunity for a remote place like Manipur, and perhaps the whole northeast India, to capitalise by exploiting this emerging global trend. Social media is today used not only for communication between persons, businesses, and corporate houses but also serves as a major source of information on almost everything and anything that is happening around us. It has become a significant source of information on tourism, travel planning, vacations, travel experiences, video blogs, and related matters. Drawing from various published works, this paper examines the endless possibilities as well as certain drawbacks of using social media in promoting tourism. The paper also highlights challenges specific to the state while using modern social media technology in tourism promotion. If harnessed properly, it could ensure equitable and sustainable tourism development in Manipur.

Keywords: Destination branding, Digital marketing, Blogging, Social media influencer, Digital literacy.

Introduction

The advent of social media platforms has brought about a paradigm shift in the global tourism ecosystem, fundamentally altering the dynamics of destination branding, marketing strategies, and tourist behaviour. In today's digital society, planning and promotion of travel and tourism rely heavily on various social media sites. In remote regions of India, such as the Northeastern states, social media platforms – particularly Instagram, YouTube, and Facebook – are instrumental in highlighting the beauty and charm of the region to different parts of the world. Social media can provide a unique experience for travellers and tourists, showcasing the vibrant festivals, breathtaking

landscapes, varied cultures, and diverse people of this region. Social media influencers, YouTubers, and travel bloggers use these platforms to create visual narratives. The works of these YouTubers and video bloggers consequently roped in both domestic and international tourists. This transformation in tourism, travel planning, and promotion boosts regional tourism and also contributes to socio-economic growth and cultural preservation. Like many other states of north-east India, Manipur is rich in its natural and scenic beauty, has a beautiful climate, and is known for the hospitality of the people. With festivals of different tribes all around the year, it is indeed a favourite tourist centre for both domestic and international tourists.

Objectives

The objectives of this study are:

- 1.To study the role of social media in the promotion of tourism in Manipur.
- 2.To study various challenges and constraints in the use of social media.

Methodology

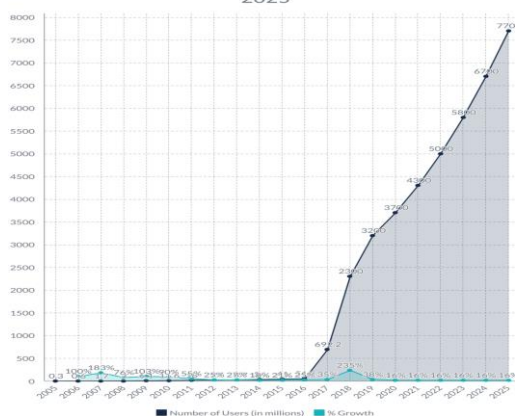
This study is grounded in library-based research methodology, which involves the systematic collection, review, and analysis of existing literature and secondary data relevant to the role of social media in tourism development. The approach is qualitative, aiming to synthesize scholarly perspectives and empirical findings to draw informed conclusions. The focus is on identifying key themes, conceptual frameworks, and empirical trends in how social media platforms influence tourism behaviours, destination marketing, and tourism growth. The present study relies on secondary sources such as reports published by national and international agencies of both government and private organizations, research articles, books, and book chapters, Government and NGO reports on tourism development and digital communication, newspaper and media sources. The selection of materials was guided by relevance, credibility, and publication within the last 10-15 years to ensure contemporary relevance.

Discussion

Why Social Media?

According to BuildOps, there is an estimated 5.24 billion social media users worldwide in 2025. Sourcing from the Global Digital Report published in 2019, BuildOps reported that "In 2005, there were only 0.3 million users, while in 2022, the number of users is expected to reach 5 billion, a 16-fold increase. Over the past 15 years, the user base has grown at a steady rate, with an average yearly growth rate of 16%. In 2017, the number of users had already reached 692 million, and it has exponentially increased to 2300 million by 2018. In 2019, the number of users had grown to 3.2 billion, a 38% growth compared to 2018, and is expected to reach 5 billion by 2022." This data indicates a significant increase in a relatively short period. According to Kemp (2025), "5.78 billion people use a mobile phone today, representing 70.5 percent of the world's total population. 5.56 billion people use the internet in 2025, which represents 67.9 percent of the global population, and 5.24 billion use social media, equating to 63.9 percent of all the people on earth."

Number of social media users worldwide from 2005 to 2025



Source: BuildOps (Number of social media users worldwide from 2005 to 2025)

Regarding the adoption and use of connected devices and services in India in 2025, Datareportal mentioned that “A total of **1.12 billion** cellular mobile connections were active in India in early 2025, with this figure equivalent to **76.6 percent** of the total population... There were **806 million** individuals using the internet in India at the start of 2025, when online penetration stood at **55.3 percent**... India was home to **491 million** social media user identities in January 2025, equating to **33.7 percent** of the total population” (Kemp, 2025). In the context of India, social media users are expected to grow manifold. At the same time, the burgeoning middle-class population with more disposable income, increasing purchasing power, and an emerging corporate culture is poised to fuel the growth of domestic tourism. Social media thus becomes the most potent platform to promote tourism, targeting both domestic and foreign tourists, luring them into the unexplored natural beauty of the various states of north-east India, including Manipur.

Tourism destination branding

Social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube have emerged as potent tools for showcasing Manipur's unique offerings, transcending geographical boundaries and reaching a global audience. Manipur's scenic beauty is so well promoted through social networking sites. They show pictures of valleys, lakes, and mountains, drawing in potential travellers. They also promote the cultural opulence of the state by popularizing its festivals, dances, crafts, and food. This gives audiences an opportunity to experience and know Manipur's culture and tradition. Tourists can communicate their experiences and opinions via social media networks. Word-of-mouth (reviews, photos, videos) shapes how others think about the destination and makes travel decisions. User-generated content is believed to be more authentic and trustworthy than traditional advertising. Today's travellers often rely on these intimate reflections when deciding where to go.

Information access and travel planning

Any kind of tourist information is now readily available on social media, which is very important for travellers. Such information is crucial for tourist to make necessary arrangements regarding their trips, which include food, lodging, transport, and places to visit. Visitors usually want to have a good idea of the place they are planning to visit. Therefore, they frequently look up reviews of past travellers, their experiences, and suggestions, which are easily available on various social media sites. In this way, social

media enables travellers to make informed decisions and boosts their confidence and sense of control over their travel experiences.

Before the advent of present-day communication technologies such as the internet, smartphones, laptops, and tablets, travel planning was cumbersome. In those days, travel information was usually found from newspaper reports, travel magazines, tourist brochures, and word-of-mouth recommendations from friends and relatives. Equipped with whatever little information one could find, people usually set out on tour. However, today, any information required is available with a few clicks or a scroll on social media. Social media, particularly Instagram, Facebook, YouTube, and X, have brought about a complete transformation in the way people make travel plans. Scrolling on selected social media sites can provide a potential traveller with vivid pictures of places, reviews and suggestions of fellow travellers, Dos and Don'ts, and other important information.

For far-flung regions like North-East India, this shift gives a much-needed boost to the tourism industry. Earlier, tourism relied on word-of-mouth and local guides. Now, social media fills the information gap and provides real narratives of the land, its people, and culture to potential tourists. Through social media, visitors get to know more about the region, discover lesser-known places, compare stays, ask for tips, and even interact with locals before visiting.

This is not just a passing trend. It is a transformation in tourism. Social media allows travellers to become co-creators of their journeys. At the same time, it turns local communities into digital storytellers. Thus, social media does more than inform travel—it actively inspires it.

Marketing and promotion

Social media platforms have emerged as essential tools for tourism organizations in Manipur. Sharma et al. (2017, p. 1272) found that tourism organizations are increasingly leveraging these platforms to craft compelling narratives around destinations and related tourism products in order to create a distinct image in the minds of potential travellers. Social media has revolutionized the way tourism is marketed, turning everyday users into global ambassadors and remote destinations into viral sensations. Platforms like Instagram, Facebook, YouTube, and X offer dynamic tools for storytelling, direct engagement, and real-time promotion. Social media has played a crucial role in demystifying the lesser-known treasures of North East India. It has brought attention to unexplored hill stations, tribal festivals, and eco-tourism trails. Social media helped local artisans and homestay owners access broader markets, empowered youth and entrepreneurs to become digital storytellers and heritage custodians.

Digital marketing for local businesses

Local businesses such as hotels, tour operators, and artisans can utilise social media to connect with tourists and promote their offerings and businesses. Small and medium-sized enterprises can leverage social media's cost-effectiveness to reach niche markets, personalize their marketing efforts, and participate in the growing digital economy (Kurnianto & Dhewi, 2022, p. 40). Promoting eco-tourism in tourist places like Loktak Lake and Shirui hills can be significantly enhanced and supported through strategic social media campaigns (Chatterjee & D'Silva, 2021, p. 81).

Unintended Miscommunication

Unintended miscommunication on social media creates challenges for tourism promotion. Destinations are sometimes promoted without accurate context. For instance, some remote areas of North East India are advertised as easily accessible. In reality, travellers often face transport difficulties. This leads to disappointment and negative reviews. Edited photographs can also exaggerate natural beauty. Such images create unrealistic expectations among tourists. When the experience is different, visitors may feel misled. This damages the reputation of the destination. Unverified rumours are another concern. False information about safety, strikes, or conflicts in Manipur has spread online. Such content discourages tourists from visiting. Thus, the spread of misinformation and disinformation on social media is a major challenge for tourism in Manipur. It can damage the image of the state. It may also reduce trust among travellers and disrupt tourism activities.

Although social media offers many benefits, its negative impacts must also be examined. In the context of Manipur, these challenges require careful and detailed analysis. A key issue is the risk of false or biased content. Such information can harm the perception of Manipur as a tourist destination. It may even discourage visitors (Sharma et al., 2017, p. 1273). This highlights the need for action from tourism organizations and stakeholders. They must monitor social media closely. They should correct misinformation quickly. They also need to share authentic and reliable content. This is essential to maintain a positive image of the state.

Promoting tourism using social media

Content creation – social media can be used in different ways to attract potential tourists. Creating high-quality visuals, photos, and short-form videos or reels on platforms like Instagram and TikTok can reach potential young tourists. Long-form videos, destination guides, and detailed tour-related videos can be promoted on YouTube and Facebook.

Influencer marketing – In collaboration with travel bloggers and YouTubers, a tourist destination can be effectively promoted. Social media influencers with large fan followings can promote tourism to a much larger audience. Influencer marketing is more effective than traditional advertising because followers consider the content more trustworthy and feel like a recommendation from a family member or a loyal friend.

Community engagement – Creating online communities of tourists who are encouraged to share their travel experiences, ask questions, and interact with locals can be helpful for tourism promotion. User-generated content, such as photos and videos with locals, is strong social proof. Such engagement builds a sense of belonging and encourages repeat visits.

Positive branding – Positive branding of a tourism destination is an inevitable step in tourism promotion. To build trust and instil a sense of safety and security among potential travellers, an honest and true ground reality of Manipur must be made available. Social media is a powerful medium through which positive experiences of tourists can be shared and exchanged.

Challenges and Considerations

Internet Connectivity and infrastructure – Transport infrastructure and internet connectivity are major issues facing tourism growth and development in many parts of

north-east India. Several beautiful lakes, mountain peaks, and waterfalls in Manipur are simply inaccessible and hence remain out of the tourist circuit. Poor digital infrastructure in rural and mountainous areas is another problem that hinders tourism promotion and information sharing.

Digital literacy and skills – While the use of smartphones has become rampant in recent years, it is used more often as an entertainment and leisure device rather than a tool that can maximise business and profitability. The lack of specific digital skills and technical know-how to use social media as a tool for marketing and business purposes needs to be addressed properly.

Authenticity and credibility – The online content must be trustworthy and authentic. Trust and credibility are the cornerstones of building a strong tourist inflow. Any negative image, fake news, or rumour about Manipur should be immediately dealt with, rectified, and necessary corrections should be made. Promoting the state of Manipur and its people as friendly, peace-loving, cooperative, and helpful is important. Sharing testimonials and positive reviews of happy and satisfied visitors to the state can be shared through social media. This can help build trust among prospective travellers.

Cultural sensitivity and ethics – The culture, tradition, and natural environment of the community should be preserved at all costs. Involving the locals in tourism planning can also do away with a lot of negative effects of tourism, such as environmental degradation, over-tourism, and social tension.

Conclusion

In conclusion, social media offers both opportunities and challenges for tourism in Manipur. Social media can take Manipur's tourism to a new height by showcasing the state's unique attractions and connecting with potential tourists. It can also support the growth of local businesses. It improves destination marketing through targeted marketing campaigns, aligning social media content with seasons, festivals, local events, and holidays. It also gives tourists easy access to information. Strategic policies and a well-thought-out plan should be evolved for promotion of tourism in Manipur. These strategies should use the potential of social media.

To face challenges in the tourism industry, all the stakeholders should make joint efforts. Government agencies, tourism organizations, local communities, and private sector enterprises must work together. Strategies that can make good use of social media while minimising potential risk factors should be explored and implemented. Eco-friendly, sustainable, and culturally sensitive strategies should be at the core of such tourism planning and development.

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