# Selecting Tourism Destinations through Social Media: Evidence from Bangladesh

**Sharmin Sultana[1] and Mrittika Shil[2]**

[1&2] Daffodil International University, Bangladesh.
E-mail: mrittika.de@diu.edu.bd (Corresponding Author)

*Abstract: Media is a tool to provide the information and images about a destination in front of the world because world is like a tiny village in the age of technology based media. Social media is more convenient than the physical manifestation to connect and engage individuals and groups in a certain object of communication. The aim of the study is to ascertain the factors in selecting the tourism destinations through social media. Data were collected through structured questionnaire survey from 317 respondents following convenience sampling method. All the responses were gathered on a five point likert scale. SPSS software 21 was used for data analysis.The statistical findings reveal that performance and customer satisfaction is the most important in influencing the choice of tourism destinations through social media followed by good business contents, sharing exciting experience, disclosure of right information and word of mouth marketing.The findings of this study might help the tourism service providers redesign the promotional activities by using social media effectively.*

*Keywords: Tourism, Destination, Social Media, Promotional Means, Business.*

## 1. Introduction

Tourism is a combination of activities through which tourists acquire contentment during their leisure. Anyone can make a tour plan for their enjoyment. The main determinants of making a tour are about passion and motivation toward visualizing the beauty of the world and opening the eyes& heart through experience gaining& learning. Tourists are able to access information easily to search tourism destinations by different media such as newspaper, magazines, television, radio, cinema, photography, video, brochure, and satellite channels. Fast technological advancement has transfigured all businesses in the world especially the tourism industry. The travel agency, tour operators and other tourism service companies present their services and offerings through social media. Some of the popular social media sites are the Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Instagram, Blog and YouTube that facilitate tourists to access such information and purchasing opportunities which were unobtainable formerly. Social media is the most popular, cheapest and dynamic version of communication. The massive reach can be possible at a time through social media by sharing experiences, opinions and comments which can be useful for customers and service providers. People are more inclined to

make travel decision because of social media advertisements. They are enthusiastic to spend their discretionary income in tourism. The main reason is availability of information, visibility of pictures and videos, ways of communication through online etc. Through social media - the attractions, accommodation, facilities can be promoted to the tourists in a single platform. Moreover, newer destinations can be developed and stimulated easily to the mass people.

Social media play a significant role both on the demand and on the supply side of tourism allowing destinations to interact directly with visitors via various internet platforms and monitor and react on visitor's opinions and evaluations of services (Királová & Pavlíceka, 2015). Fast technological advancement has transfigured all businesses in the world especially the tourism industry. The travel agency, tour operators and other tourism service companies present their services and offerings through social media. Sahin and Segun (2015) discovered that social media have influences on tourism sector both in positive and negative ways as the tourism decisions of young generation have been strongly affected by comments and personal experiences of other users on social media. Dexter et al., (2014) discovered that in social media, customers' opinions, thoughts and expressions are not well presented that leads to bad impressions and unfair criticism. Tourists need to know by means of reliable sources how their experience is going to be liked in order to reduce uncertainty and create some expectations of what they are going to end at a destination (Richard & Guppy, 2014). Therefore understanding the importance of social media, the present study aims to explore which issues are important for the customers while selecting tourism destinations through social media.

## 2. Literature Review

Over the last decade, the growth of Internet technologies as well as social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, MySpace vibe, Pinterest, and Instagram, has increased significantly. From a basic online tool, these sites become a media for content sharing as a part of media landscape (Singh, Lehnert & Bostick, 2012). Statistics show there were 2.078 billion social media accounts that were active in January 2015 globally, with Facebook leading with a total of 1.4 billion users (Kemp, 2015; Statista, 2015). Lyu and Wang (2015) stated that travelers now prefer social media than traditional sources of information. It is mentioned that social media has a tremendous influence on travel industry (Fotis, Buhalis&Rossides, 2011; Hays, Page &Buhalis, 2013; Xiang &Gretzel, 2010). At present the major social networking websites are Facebook, LinkedIn, MySpace, blogs, YouTube, Scribd, Flickr, micro blogs, Twitter, collaborative projects Wikipedia, Wikitravel and consumer review and rating sites such as Trip Advisor (Fotis et al., 2012). Due to increasing popularity of internet applications, many tourism organizations such as hotels, airline companies and travel agencies have started using

internet as one of their important marketing and communications strategies (Sahin & Segun, 2015). Warta and Tamara (2011) asserted that a picture is worth, indeed, a thousand words, and a large number of hotels and destination resorts are now taking advantage of the image-filled media of print, Internet and television to entice potential vacationers. Recently, social media & web sites have emerged as an important information channel including blogs, virtual communities, wikis, social networks, collaborative tagging, and media files and videos shared in YouTube and Flickr, has gained substantial popularity among online travelers (Gretzel, 2006). The number of people's search for holiday information is increasing day by day. During information search processes, consumers increasingly rely on other travelers' experiences to reduce uncertainty and in online social media people interact freely and easily exchange information (Buhalis et al., 2011; Fotis et al., 2012; Yoo et al., 2009). Xiang and Gretzel (2010) stated that tourism marketers can no longer ignore the role of social media in distributing travel-related information and social media sites in the internet today are used more frequently than the physical participation of individuals in a communication. Blackshaw and Nazzaro (2006) describes social media as the internet-based applications that carry consumer generated content relevant to the past experiences or online information issues. Gretzel, Yoo & Purifoy (2007) found that online reviews and rating websites, increase travelers confidence during decision making. Živković, Gajić and Brdar (2014), identified that travelers enjoy giving review on shopping, local cuisine, food, historical sites, museums and galleries, as well as theme parks through social media. Though some studies (Buhalis et al., 2011; Fotis et al., 2012; Yoo et al., 2009; Blackshaw, 2006; Živkovićet al.,2014) have been conducted in other countries on selecting tourism destinations through social media, such types of researches are hardly conducted in Bangladesh. From that ground the present study is undertaken to explore the determinants of tourism destinations selection through social media.

## 3. Objectives of the study

The purpose of this paper is to identify the increasing importance of social media in choosing smart tourism destinations. Specifically the study aims at identifying the factors influencing the tourism destinations selection through social media.

## 4. Methodology

The present study is designed to explore which factors are important for the tourists for selecting a tourism destination through social media.From the prevailing literature, it has been found that successful social media promotion can influence the tourists a lot to select a tourism destination. Here the selection of tourism destination is dependent variable and determinants five factors of choosing tourism destination such as disclosure of right information, Sharing exciting information, Ensuring performance and customer satisfaction, Word of mouth & Managing proper business contents through social media

are the independent variables for measurement. Samples of the study include 317 people selected through convenience sampling technique. Only those people who had previous experience of choosing tourism destinations through social media were surveyed. Both primary and secondary data have been used for the purpose of the study. Primary data have been collected through a structured questionnaire survey among the respondents. Secondary data have been collected from publications, articles, journals, websites, newspapers and books.The collected data have been analyzed utilizing the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS)software. Descriptive statistics and regression model output were generated using the SPSS software.

## 5. Research Hypotheses

Based on the previous literature, the study has proposed some hypotheses. The hypotheses of this study are the followings:

$H_1$: Disclosure of right information has a positive relationship with the selection of tourism destination.

$H_2$: Sharing experiences, comments and opinions has a positive relationship with the selection of tourism destination.

$H_3$: Performance and customer satisfaction has a positive relationship with the selection of tourism destination.

$H_4$: Word of mouth has a positive relationship with the selection of tourism destination

$H_5$: Managing good business contents has a positive relationship with the selection of tourism destination.

## 6. Demographic Profile of the Respondents

The total number of respondents was 318. The number of male respondents was 256 and female respondents were 62. Among all the media, the Facebook users were 24 %, Instagram users were 23%, flicker.com users were 12 %, trip advisor users were 11%, Twitter users were 11%, Pinterestusers were 9 %, Snapchat 5% &blogs users were 3 % and others 2 %. Around 75% respondents use social media 'Sometime' to make trip, 13% respondents use social media "always" to make a trip and 12% respondents have given "Neutral" response in using social media to make a trip. From this survey authors found around 56 % prefer arranging tour by known community, around 17 % respondents prefer selecting tourism destination from most frequently coming pages on social media, around 24 % respondents prefer selecting tourism destinations which packages got higher rating and 3 % either never selected or self-researched.

## 7. Statistical Findings

This section presents the statistical findings generated from the collected data.

### 7.1. Descriptive Statistics

This descriptive statistics mainly provides the information of mean and standard deviations of the variables.

**Table 1: Descriptive Statistics**

| Variables | Mean | Standard Deviation |
|---|---|---|
| Disclosure of Information | 4.08 | .694 |
| Sharing Experiences | 4.06 | .743 |
| Performance and Satisfaction | 4.03 | .696 |
| Word of Mouth | 3.95 | .700 |
| Manage Business Contents | 3.97 | .712 |

Table – 1 presents the descriptive statistics such as mean values, standard deviation of the variables. Here all the mean values of variables are above and close to 4 and all the standard deviation from the variables is less than 1. Hence the respondents more or less agreed on the variables that have an impact on choosing tourism destination through social media.

## 7.2. Reliability of Data

Cronbach alpha values were used to test the reliability of data. Table 2 shows that all the Cronbach alpha values are above 0.7 which represents a good internal consistency of data.Therefore the data of this study are reliable.

**Table 2: Reliability of the constructs**

| Variables | Cronbach Alpha |
|---|---|
| Disclosure of Information | 0.780 |
| Sharing Experiences | 0.802 |
| Performance and Satisfaction | 0.830 |
| Word of Mouth | 0.755 |
| Manage Business Contents | 0.977 |
| Selection of tourism destination | 0.744 |

## 7.3. Hypotheses Testing Results

After confirming the reliability of data, with for testing the hypotheses, regression analysis is done SPSS software in order to examine the relationship between the independent variables and dependent variable. Table 3 shows the regression analysis output.

## Table 3: Results of regression analysis

| Hypotheses | SE | β | t | Sig | $R^2$ |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **H1:** Disclosure of Right Information -> Selection of Tourism Destination | .167 | 0.387 | 2.743 | 0.020 | 0.629 |
| **H2:** Sharing Exciting Experience With Social Media Promotion -> Selection of Tourism Destination | .152 | 0.217 | 3.342 | 0.000 | |
| **H3:** Performance and Customer Satisfaction -> Selection of Tourism Destination | .154 | 0.322 | 5.480 | 0.000 | |
| **H4:** Word of Mouth With Social Media Promotion-> Selection of Tourism Destination | .151 | 0.298 | 2,011 | 0.040 | |
| **H5:** Managing Good Business Contents With Social Media Promotion -> Selection of Tourism Destination | .152 | 0.396 | 3,659 | 0.000 | |

Result of the regression analysis shows that all the independent variables are strongly correlated with the dependent variable. Table-3 represents that disclosure of right information has a significant association with the selection of tourism destination ($p<0.01$). So, hypothesis (H1) is supported and it indicates that disclosure of right information through social media is important for the selection of tourism destination. Again Table -3 shows a significant relationship between sharing exciting information through social media and the selection of tourism destination ($p<0.01$). Result indicated that sharing exciting experiences can influence the tourists to choose a particular tourists spot. Hence, hypothesis (H2) is accepted. Statistical findings also reveal that performance and customer satisfaction has a significant positive relationship with the selection of tourism destination ($p<0.01$). So hypothesis (H3) is accepted. If tourism service provider satisfies their existing customers, it can help promote the tourism business. Table- 4 also shows a significant positive association between word of mouth marketing through social media and the selection of tourism destination and thus hypothesis (H4) is accepted. Finally hypothesis (H5) is also supported as there is significant association between managing good business contents and the selection of tourism destination. So tourism service providers should put emphasis on designing the tour package guided by the customer preferences.

## 8. Discussion and Conclusion

The study was to determine the factors influencing the tourists to choose tourism destinations through social media. Social media promotion includes disclosing information, sharing the tour experiences, managing business content, performance and customer satisfaction and word of mouth. The statistical findings reveal that performance and customer satisfaction is the most important in influencing the choice of tourism destinations through social media followed by good business contents, sharing exciting experience, disclosure of right information and word of mouth marketing.

The study found that majority of the tourists choose the tourism destinations by analyzing many factors and the following five factors are common to all. A good tour package, highly satisfied customer, word of mouth and relevant information availability in the social media attract the tourist to select the destination to make a tour plan. These findings are supported by the different authors who found that a good tour package, highly satisfied customer, word of mouth and relevant information availability in the social media are important while choosing tourism destinations. A tourism business company/ tourism service provider should take the factors as their vital approach to promote their tourism products in social media because social media is the open communication forum now a day's especially Facebook, Instagram, Pinterest are the relevant sources where tourist search for information. Social media is the sensitive version of communication, any unauthorized information can ruin the goodwill of the business, the customers are price and information sensitive, so a service provider should develop their content with a good balance. Sharing travel experiences, opinions and comments are important now a days because customers search for information in social media and take the feedback as a tool in selecting a service provider for making a trip. Social media is a proven strategy to promote tourism business rather than arranging promotional campaign because customers reach out is easier than any media and the popular items go viral where maximum reach can be possible. Social media disseminates the information faster than any media where information is accessed, provided and received in every corner of the world. Managing good business content in social media is crucial because travelers seek good and authentic contents to decide over a trip. Word of mouth can be a good promotional option for the tourism service providers because word attracts the fellow mates. This study provides the insights of promoting the tourism business through social media and all the factors are relevant on the perspective of technology oriented global business. The factors identified in the research such as managing and providing good business contents, experience shared by the customers in different pages, analyzing and measuring the performance and customer satisfaction, proving the opportunity of service recovery and word of mouth are crucial for choosing a tourism destination through social media. Therefore, the findings of this study might help the tourism service providers redesign the promotional activities by using social media effectively. The study is conducted in Dhaka division only and sample size is restricted to internet or online users where contacting officials or collecting expert opinion was difficult. This research could be arranged in a broader perspective especially for the aged group. The study was mainly conducted on young people who are working or studying in a university.

## References

1.  Buhalis, 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.

2.  Buhalis, D. (2013). e-Tourism trends and challenges in the social media era; UNWTO seminar on Tourism and New Technologies. San Jose, Costa Rica, www.unwto.org:accessesd: 3/1/2014.

3.  Bhakuni, P. & Aronkar, P., (2012). Effect of social media advertising on purchase intentions of students- An empirical study conducted in Gwalior City. *International Journal of Applied Services Marketing Perspectives 1* (1), 1–7.

4.  Dexter R. Buted & Nancy S. (2014). Effects of Social Media in the Tourism Industry of Batangas Province. *Asia Pacific Journal of Multidisciplinary Research 2* (3), 112-131.

5.  Fotis, J., Buhalis, D. & Rossides, N. (2011). Social media impact on holiday travel planning: The case of the Russian and the FSU markets. *International Journal of Online Marketing (IJOM), 1* (4), 1-19.

6.  Fotis, J. Buhalis, D & Rossides, N. (2012). Social media use and impact during the holiday planning process. *Information and Communication Technologies in Tourism,* Springer- Verlag, 13-24.

7.  Gonca G.S., & Gunce Sengün (2015). The Effects of Social Media on Tourism Marketing: A Study among University Students. *Management and Administra tive Science Review, 4* (5), 772-786.

8.  Gretzel, U. (2006). Consumer generated content - trends and implications for branding. *E- Review of Tourism Research, 4* (3), 9-11.

9.  Gretzel, Yoo&Purifoy (2007). Potential and implications for destination man agement of Online Travel Reviews'argumentative analysis. The case of domes tic and international tourism market in Jiuzhaigou National Park, China. *Journal of Travel Research, 45,* 116–126.

10. Gretzel, U., Kang, M. & Lee, W. (2008). Differences in consumer-generated media adoption and use: A cross-national perspective. *Journal of Hospitality and Leisure Marketing, 17* (1/2), 99-120.

11. Hays, S., Page, S. J. & Buhalis, D. (2013). Social media as a destination marketing tool: its use by national tourism organizations. *Current Issues in Tourism, 16* (3), 211-239.

12. ISM (2014). The Impact of Social Media on Travel and Tourism, Article. Avail able atwww.socialsamosa.com/2014/09.

13. Ioanna B., & Panagiota D. (2013). The Influence of Tourist Trends of Youth Tourism through Social Media (SM) & Information and Communication Tech nologies (ICTs). *Procedia -Social and Behavioral Sciences 73,* 652–660.

14. Kemp, S., (2015). Digital, social & mobile in 2015, viewed 21 January 2016, from http:// wearesocial.com/uk/special-reports/digital-social-mobile- worldwide-2015

15. Lyu, S.O. & Wang, J. (2015). Are the days of information centres gone? Effects of the ubiquitous information availability. *Tourism Management 48*, 54–63.

16. Lange-Faria, W. & Elliot, S. (2012). Understanding the role of social media in destination marketing. Tourismos. *An International Multidisciplinary Journal of Tourism, 7* (1), 124-132.

17. Poon, A. (2011). Everything that you need to know about internet marketing. Tourism Intelligence International. (www.tourismintelligence.com) accessed 18/12/2018.

18. Richard, J.E. & Guppy, S. (2014). Facebook: Investigating the influence on consumer purchase intention. *Asian Journal of Business Research 4* (2), 1–10.

19. Rosemary & Mercy (2017). Social media in tourism: Establishing factors influencing attitudes towards the usage of social networking sites for trip organization. *Acta Commer, 17* (1) 396-405.

20. Singh, N., Lehnert, K. & Bostick, K. (2012). Global social media usage: Insights into reaching consumers worldwide. *Thunderbird International Business Review 54* (5), 684–695.

21. Warta, Tamara (2011). Importance of Print and visual media in the promotion of tourism.", eHow Articles, accessed online at http://www.ehow.com/info_7907379_importance-vision mediapromotion-tourism.html, 14.12.2011.

22. Xiang, Z. & Gretzel, U. (2010). Role of social media in online travel information search. *Tourism management, 31* (2), 179-188.

23. Zeithaml, V.A., Bitner, M.J. & Gremler, D.D. (2006). Services marketing: Integrating customer focus across the Firm. 4th ed. London: McGraw-Hill.

24. Zeng B. (2013). Social Media in Tourism. *Journal of Tourism Hospitality, 2* (2), 125-136.