

Unlocking The Power Of Trust: How High Quality Social Media Content Influences Travel Intentions

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Abstract

In an era where digital platforms shape consumer decisions, this study examines the profound impact of tourism related social media information on consumer travel intentions, with the mediating role of destination trust. For this purpose, purposive sampling technique was used, and data were collected from the 402 consumers in which 68% were male and 31% were female. Additionally, 58% participants revealed that they had gone 1-3 international trips in the past two year. Overall, participants have generally positive attitudes regarding online information, destination trust, and travel intentions. Furthermore, quality of tourism related information had a significant positive effect on consumer travel intentions. Similarly, the quality of tourism related information has a positive effect on trust and destination trust has a positive significant association with consumer travel intentions. Companies and destination marketing agencies can utilize this information to enhance their online reputation and visibility.

Keywords: online content, tourism, trust, travel intention, social media.

Introduction

The growing prevalence of Web 2.0 functionalities has led to an increased importance of social media in people's everyday lives (Lourenção et al., 2020). Recently, social media platforms have become the primary channels for sharing news and ideas. Marketing communication strategies in the hotel and tourism industry have undergone significant changes (Song & Yoo, 2016). The effectiveness of social networks depends on the accuracy of the information they share. This understanding is a value for individuals participating in travel activities.

Social media has greatly improved consumers' capacity to access and understand public events, products, and services (Gao & Lee, 2017). The extensive usage of social media platforms, which has been empirically demonstrated to enhance the dissemination of information, alleviate feelings of worry, and cultivate a sense of belonging within online communities, is profoundly transforming individuals' behaviors regarding travel and leisure activities (Wang et al., 2020). Consequently, social media platforms have been emerged as a prominent venue for the generation, promotion, and distribution of material produced by users (Sin et al., 2020), establishing themselves as the primary source for those seeking travel-related information on the internet. Despite the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, the proliferation of user-generated content (UGC) within the tourism industry continues to exert a significant impact on the travel choices made by numerous consumers (Flores-Ruiz et al., 2021). In spite of the COVID-19 pandemic, Hanafiah et al. (2022) have found that social media continues to exert a substantial influence on individuals' travel choices.

The examination of the impact of travel-related information on consumer behavior has been the focal point of scholarly research. The adoption of social media visitor information may be elucidated by the technological acceptance model (Cheunkamon et al., 2020). According to Li et al. (2023), individuals who are considering traveling are inclined to utilize social media platforms that cater to their specific interests in order to facilitate the planning process for their vacations. The chance of visitors adopting information from online reviews is influenced by core and peripheral path elements, as posited by the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) (Filieri & McLeay, 2013). The study conducted by researchers aimed to examine the influence of internet reviews and social media platforms on the decision-making process of tourists while

selecting accommodations and holiday destinations. In their study, Chung and Han (2017) employed the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) to illustrate the impact of social media tourist information on visitors. Kapoor et al. (2021) suggest that the reservation intent for hotels may be positively influenced by the quality of information (Zhao et al., 2022).

The Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM)(Petty et al., 1983) hypothesis is a widely used approach in the study of the impact of social media tourist information (TGC) on traveler behavior. The ELM approach neglects the consideration of the psychological characteristics of prospective visitors, instead prioritizing the examination of the direct impact of persuasive factors on consumer behavior. Nevertheless, numerous studies employ consumer attitudes or perceived destination impressions (Kapoor et al., 2021). Schroeder and Pennington-Gray (2014) employed a deductive approach to examine the impact of social media on the decision-making process of international tourists, with a specific emphasis on crisis situations. Conversely, Tse (2013) adopted a case-study methodology to explore the marketing function of social media within the hotel industry, specifically examining its role in online communication and distribution. The efficacy of social media in the domains of travel marketing, management, and decision-making has been substantiated by existing research, but with limited inductive investigation conducted thus far.

This research attempts to shed light on the psychological process of consumers' emotional choice path by proposing a rational and emotional decision-making process that explains how tourism information on social media influences consumers' trip intentions. We also examine how trust mediates the relationship between social media information and the consumer travel intentions.

Literature Review

1. Role of Consumers in tourism

According to Lemon and Verhoef (2016), the customer journey can be divided into three separate phases: pre-purchase, during-purchase, and post-purchase. According to the findings of Chon, (2015), the online holiday decision-making processes of consumers consist of three distinct segments, namely information search, evaluation, and purchase. The primary stage of the process is

distinguished by the impact of online engagement on a consumer's level of interest in a particular destination. Tussyadiah and Fesenmaier (2009) suggest that the development of tourist videos has the potential to enhance interest in a particular destination. According to Hudson and Thal (2013), customers' favorable opinion of the place throughout the search process is reinforced by their reliance on the information presented by social media platforms. Consumers utilize personal recommendations and internet assessments as crucial sources of information when making selections (Chon, 2015). According to Lemon and Verhoeven (2016), clients engage exclusively with companies throughout the purchasing process when choosing and paying for their preferred vacation package. Following a purchase, individuals who have taken a holiday evaluate the extent to which their trip fulfilled their anticipated outcomes. Subsequently, an individual develops a positive or negative perception, which is frequently disseminated on social media platforms and has the potential to impact the decision-making process of prospective travelers (Khamis et al., 2017). Lemon and Verhoef (2016) conducted study which suggests that the level of trust a customer has in a business can have an impact on their experiences, and conversely, the experiences a consumer has can also influence their level of trust.

2. Tourism related information on Social Media

Due of the intangible and concurrent nature of tourism products, individuals engaging in tourism seek access to knowledge in order to mitigate the risks and uncertainties associated with travel. Tourists engage in micro-blogging, blogging, and online forum participation to generate a significant amount of user-generated content (UGC) with the purpose of sharing information on their vacation spots (Tsiakali, 2015). The impact of social media imagery on travel decision-making has been explored in previous studies (Nezakati et al., 2015). The utilization of social media for travel planning has become more prevalent among vacationers. Servidio and Ruffolo (2016) identified a strong correlation between visitors' behavioral engagements and the lasting, unforgettable experiences they acquire during their holiday. According to Miyakawa et al. (2022), an increased number of vacationers actively engaging in their experiences facilitate the process of recalling and then sharing those memories on social media platforms. According to the study conducted by Chin et al. (2020),

the prioritization of exceptional tourist experiences surpasses the significance of destination management or marketing. In their study, Yu et al. (2021) developed a methodology aimed at effectively identifying urban landmarks and attractions, with the objective of discerning prevalent social media patterns and topics of discussion among visitors.

The commercial value of information quality lies in its ability to shape consumers' receptiveness to novel concepts and their purchase patterns. The judgments made by passengers may be influenced by the quality of information available online. According to Filieri and McLeay (2013), the adoption rates of visitors in online comment sections can be influenced by the validity, timeliness, and relevancy of the information. User-generated content (UGC) that is positive in nature has the potential to exert a significant impact on consumer behavior. This influence can manifest in various ways, such as encouraging consumers to share information and make direct purchases, fostering their intention to make future purchases, and cultivating brand loyalty. Additionally, positive UGC has the ability to encourage and please consumers.

3. Mediating role of Destination Trust

According to Moorman et al. (1992), trust in social communication can be characterized as a positive and assured attitude exhibited towards an individual or a collective entity. This examination provides insights into an individual's level of openness towards and understanding of transaction risks. The establishment of trust in a destination's ability to fulfill commitments made to tourists is of utmost importance. The lack of consistent information hinders consumers' ability to make informed judgments regarding travel items. Consumers are increasingly dependent on reliable sources of information in order to form more accurate perceptions of their trip locations. Instead of being exposed to traditional advertising, individuals on social media platforms opt to engage in discussions about their personal shopping encounters. The objectivity and lack of bias in user-generated content are attributed to its non-commercial nature and widespread accessibility (Ridings et al., 2002). This characteristic facilitates customers in making informed choices pertaining to their travel arrangements. According to the findings of Iordanova and Stainton (2019), the credibility of users' personal judgments of a destination surpassed that of official

promotional materials disseminated by tourist boards and enterprises. There is a potential for users to harbor skepticism towards online travel assessments as a result of the potential for manipulation and alteration (Fan et al., 2018). The assessment of information sources by consumers is contingent upon the criteria outlined in the research conducted by Mahat and Hanafiah (2020), encompassing factors such as reliability, privacy, transparency, and accuracy. To enhance customer purchase intention, it is imperative for online marketing strategies targeting visitors to cultivate a sense of trust (Li et al., 2020).

4. Consumer Intentions towards Travel

According to Smith (2004), behavioral intention can be defined as an individual's inclination or probability to engage in a specific action pertaining to a given activity or item. The accuracy of predicting consumer purchase behavior is best determined by their purchasing intentions. Through the examination of individuals' intentions, researchers are able to get significant understanding regarding their forthcoming actions, encompassing a wide spectrum of behaviors such as trip arrangements and consumer choices (Torres et al., 2015). Previous research conducted by Lu et al. (2013) has provided evidence supporting the notion that individuals' expectations, plans, or intentions for future behavior can effectively predict the activities of travelers throughout their journeys.

Consumers engage in the evaluation of various data as they develop their opinions regarding a product or service. Consumers exhibit a greater propensity to direct their attention towards and engage in thoughtful deliberation of information when they perceive it to possess qualities of comprehensiveness, accuracy, relevance, and authenticity. According to Kim et al. (2017), individuals are more proficient in understanding products and services, obtaining assistance, and making well-informed choices when they are provided with information of superior quality. The impact of online travel reviews on customers' booking decisions has been extensively examined in several studies (Zhao et al., 2015). These studies consistently demonstrate a noteworthy and favorable influence of online travel reviews on consumers' decision-making processes. Lata and Rana (2021) assert that the substance of the material has the potential to impact an individual's inclination to make an online hotel reservation.

Conceptual Model of the study

We have proposed a model (figure-01) based on the consumer journey to analyze the direct effect of tourism related information on social media on consumer travel intentions. Additionally we also examine the role of trust as a mediating variable in the process.

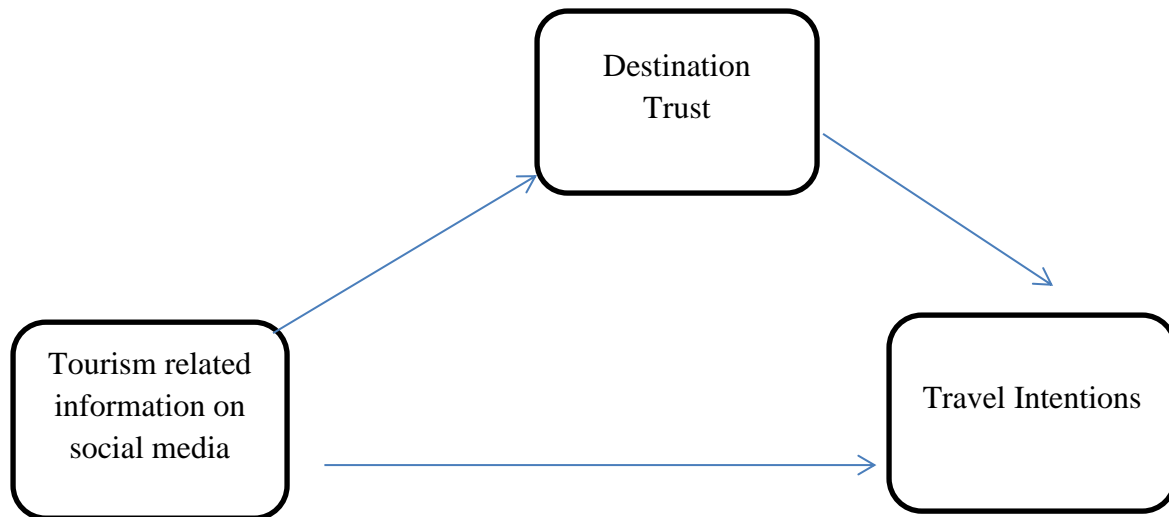


Figure 01 depicts the interrelationships among variables.

Hypothesis of the study

H1: The quality of tourism related information has a significant positive effect on consumer travel intentions.

H2: Trust mediates the relationship between tourism related information on social media and consumer travel intentions.

Methodology

This study involved the collection of data from the northern regions of Pakistan, which are renowned for tourist attractions such as the Big Mountains, waterfalls, and greenery surroundings. To accomplish the aims of this study, the required information was gathered using a method of purposive sampling. In the process of measuring variables, researchers employ scales that possess a reasonable degree of validity, and subsequently alter these scales

as required based on the specific setting of the study. The informed consent was obtained from the participants.

Questionnaires

The questionnaire contains two primary sections. Initially, demographic features and Key variables: using a scale ranging from 1 for "strongly disagree" to 5 for "strongly agree," the Likert 5-point rating system was implemented.

1. First, the propensity of travelers to utilize social media information. Zhang et al. (2014) devised an eight-item scale for operationalizing information quality.
2. The destination trust measuring set contained four items (McAllister, 1995).
3. In order to evaluate people's travel intentions, Smith (2004) incorporated a total of four factors into his research.

Statistical Analysis

The initial stage of the result section involved the validating the authenticity and reliability of the data using SPSS and AMOS. The objective of this study is to examine the underlying assumptions presented in the introduction. The report provides an examination of confirmatory factors, along with the corresponding factor loadings. The table mentioned serves as the fundamental basis for numerous assessments of reliability.

Results

Table 01 Consumer characteristics (N= 402)

Demographics	Frequency (%)
Gender	
Male	274 (68.1)
Female	128 (31.9)
Age of the consumer	
15-30	212 (52.7)
31-50	190 (47.3)
Frequency of International travel over past two years	
1-3	237 (58.9)
More than 5	165 (41.1)

Travel companion	
Alone	45 (11.1)
Friends	172 (42.7)
Family	101 (25.1)
Business (colleagues)	84 (21.1)
Trip Arrangements	
Packaged	218 (54.3)
Independent	184 (45.7)
Tourism related social media information followed during travel	
Yes	258 (64.1)
No	144 (35.9)

In the current study, table 01 presents the demographic characteristics of the study participants. Among them, 68.1% were male and voluntary participated, while 31.9% were female. The majority of the participants (52.7%) fell within the range of 15-30 years. Regarding their frequency of international travel over the past two years, participants revealed that approximately 58.9% undertook 1-3 trips within this period. Notably, a significant number of participants (42.7%) planned their trip with friends, followed by family members (25.1%) and with colleagues (21.1%), with only 11.1% of individuals prefer solo travel.

Additionally, 54.3% of the respondents arranged their trips by using the packages deals offered by tourist companies, while 45% arranged their trips independently. Participants also revealed that 64.1% used and reads blogs providing tourism related information, which they found useful during their travel.

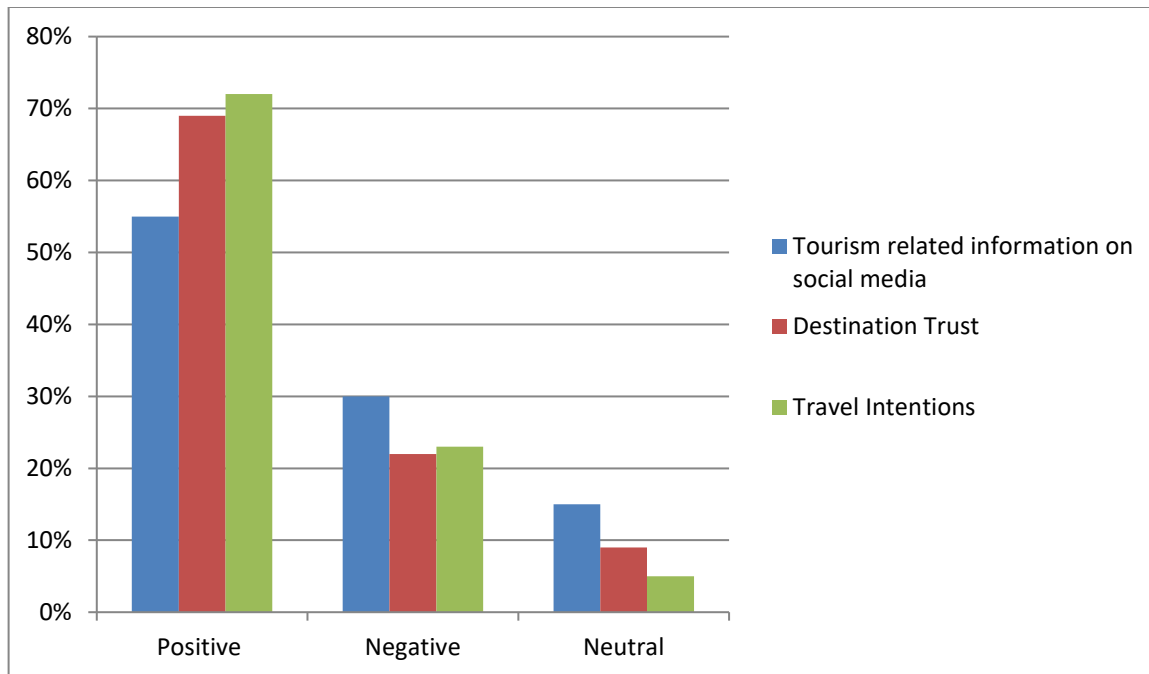


Figure 02 Descriptive responses of the participants

Figure 02 depicts three crucial aspects of the study: respondents' perspectives on "tourism-related information on social media," "destination trust," and "travel intentions." This chart displays the proportion of positive, negative, and neutral responses. 55% of respondents reacted favorably to the statement "tourism-related information on social media." In addition to this positive opinion, 69% of respondents expressed a great deal of confidence in the location. In addition, 72% of the participants in the study had significant "Travel Intentions," or the desire to travel.

Less than one-third of respondents (30%) have a negative view of "tourism-related information on social media" in the category of depressive attitudes. This negatively affects both travel intentions (at 23%) and confidence in the destination (22%).

People who have mixed sentiments about a subject are classified as neutral. 15% of respondents have no strong opinions regarding "tourism-related information on social media," but only 9% feel the same way about their confidence in vacation destinations, and only 5% have no bias regarding their future travel plans.

Figure 02 provides a comprehensive summary of these three main aspects and sheds light on the opinions and attitudes of

respondents regarding tourism-related social media information trust in destinations, and travel plans.

Table 02 Factor Loadings of Constructs and Indicators of Reliability

Constructs	Factor loadings (>0.50)	α (>0.70)	CR(>0.70)	AVE (>0.50)
Tourism related information on social media		0.79	0.81	0.73
TRISM1	0.92			
TRISM2	0.78			
TRISM3	0.80			
TRISM4	0.77			
Trust		.93	0.73	0.74
T1	0.86			
T2	0.87			
T3	0.80			
Travel Intentions		.84	0.70	0.61
TI1	0.69			
TI2	0.81			
TI3	0.75			
TI4	0.83			

Based on the data presented in Table 02, it can be shown that all the constructs that were tested exhibited factor loading levels that surpassed the threshold value of 0.50. Furthermore, with the exception of one, all of these findings exhibited statistical significance at the 0.001 level, suggesting a substantial level of confidence. The model demonstrated exceptional performance in terms of fit, as seen by its successful passing of the CFA, GFI, NFI, RMSEA, and RMR tests. Hence, it is imperative to assess the accuracy of the indication. Factor loadings are employed in order to assess the validity of an indicator. According to Bagozzi and Yi (1991), the reliability testing is considered complete when the

factor loading of the indicator surpasses 0.5. The definitive results are presented in Table 02. The findings indicate that all components have been loaded correctly. The assessment of the dependability of prior findings was afterwards conducted utilizing composite reliability. Hair et al. (2010) argue that in order to assess the dependability of a measure, it is necessary for the measure's composite reliability to exceed a threshold of 0.70. Table 02 provides evidence of the established internal consistency of the construct, as indicated by the composite reliability values exceeding the minimum acceptable threshold of 0.70. Subsequently, it is necessary to ascertain the convergent validity. In accordance with the findings of Hair et al. (2010), a variance analysis was performed to establish the presence of convergent validity, yielding a p-value of 0.5. The convergent validity of the study was assessed by employing the average variance extraction approach. Table 02 provides empirical evidence in favor of the convergent hypothesis, as it reveals that all constructs have Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values over 0.50. A Cronbach's alpha coefficient exceeding 0.7 indicates the reliability of the scale.

Table 03 Discriminant Validity

Latent variables	Tourism Information	Trust	Travel Intentions
Tourism Information	.82*		
Trust	.71	.75*	
Travel Intentions	.80	.75	.92*

The validity and reliability of our scale were determined using factor loadings, composite reliability, and variance analysis. The results demonstrate that the specified requirements have been met. The verification of discriminant validity is the subsequent factor that requires attention. In our study, we utilized the Fornell and Larcker (1981) criterion, which is widely regarded as a reliable set of criteria, to assess discriminant validity. There is no statistically significant association between the hypotheses above the square root of the average extracted variance (AVE) of the constructs, as shown in Table 3. Consequently, the data satisfy the discriminant validity criteria.

Table 04 Hypothesis Testing

Hypotheses	Estimated β	SE	CR	P	Decision
H1	0.52	0.070	9.727	0.001	Supported
H2	0.31	0.502	3.601	.026	Supported

In order to evaluate the hypothesis, the phase following the model specification evaluation must involve an analysis of causal relationships. In this inquiry, two hypotheses have been proposed. To measure the direct and indirect relationships between variables structural equation modeling method is used to demonstrate direct connections, while the other evaluates the significance of a mediating variable. Using 5000 bootstrap samples, a bootstrap method was employed to analyze mediation. Table 4 presents the frequently observed direct influences. In this regard, H1 demonstrated that quality of tourism related information has a significant positive effect on consumer travel intentions ($\beta = 0.52^{***}$, $p = 0.001$), thus substantiating the acceptance of Hypothesis 1. Similarly, quality of tourism related information has a positive effect on trust and trust has a positive significant association with consumer travel intentions ($\beta = 0.31^*$, $p = 0.026$). The study result confirms that trust mediates the positive relationship between the quality of tourism related information and the consumer travel intentions.

Discussion & Conclusion

The findings of this study shed new light on the intricate relationships between consumer trust, travel intentions, and the quality of tourism-related information. We set out to investigate these relationships and tested two hypotheses. First, according to Hypothesis 1, the quality of tourism-related information has a significant positive effect on consumer travel intentions. This theory is substantially supported by our findings, which demonstrate a robust and highly significant relationship between consumer travel intentions and the quality of tourism-related information. As stated by Lemon and Verhoef (2016), Tseng (2017), Pop et al. (2021), investigating online travel information and variations in travelers' intentions under different review emotional

intensities contributes to our understanding of this relationship. In addition, prior research has shown that travelers' levels of trust in their travel destinations may vary based on various online travel-related information; positive online reviews tend to increase travelers' trust in their travel destinations, while negative online reviews tend to decrease travelers' trust in their travel destinations (Pop et al., 2021; Tran &Strutton, 2019). The results of our study, which are depicted in Figure 02, indicate that participants have generally positive attitudes regarding online information, destination trust, and travel intentions. It also supports the claim by Kim and Jun (2016) that visitors will have more positive attitudes and stronger intentions to visit a destination if their self-concept is more congruent with its image.

In addition, we examined the mediating role of trust in this relationship in greater depth in our research. The findings indicate that the quality of tourism-related information influences trust positively. This suggests that consumers are more likely to have faith in social media posts that contain high-quality information. Importantly, a statistically significant positive correlation exists between consumer trust and their propensity to travel. Prior research has examined the effect of trust and the e-service environment on customer loyalty and electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM), with the conclusion that trust plays a crucial role as a mediator in this relationship (Tran &Strutton, 2019). Few researchers (Su et al., 2021; Wang & Yan, 2022) have examined and confirmed the positive effect of destination trust on travelers' intention to travel in the context of tourism. Marinao Artigas et al. (2017) and Zheng et al. (2021) are two of the few studies that examine how to develop tourists' trust in a destination and what factors influence that trust.

All of these findings support the notion that trust moderates the relationship between consumer travel intentions and the quality of tourism-related information. Essentially, trust functions as a link between the travel intentions of customers and the perceived quality of social media information. This mediation effect highlights the importance of establishing and maintaining trust in the context of the travel industry, as it not only influences travel decisions directly but also enhances the impact of the information consumers' encounter.

Companies and destination marketing agencies can utilize this information to enhance their online reputation and visibility. Their ability to establish credibility with their target audience and consistently provide high-quality content enables them to positively influence consumers' travel preferences. Moreover, by recognizing the mediating function of trust, marketing and communication strategies can be developed in a more calculated and tailored manner, thereby fostering the growth of the tourism industry. Overall, our research demonstrates how these variables influence consumer behavior and sets the groundwork for future research in this area.

Managerial Implications

In today's swiftly changing digital landscape, travel managers must comprehend the transformative influence of high-quality social media content on the expectations of travelers. To maximize this opportunity, they should focus on creating and selecting visually appealing images, educational films, and captivating stories. Content creators, photographers, and videographers require resources to continue producing engaging content. Genuine and transparent social media content is essential for obtaining prospective travelers' trust. Do not over edit or fabricate relationships and sponsorships. Trust is fostered by authentic travel experiences, which in turn encourages user-generated content. Contests and sponsored hash tags are two UGC strategies with the potential to increase engagement. Trust and connection are cultivated in an online community by actively engaging with followers and responding to comments and feedback in a professional manner. Establishing strategic alliances with trustworthy, brand-aligned influencers can increase the impact of travel experiences on the intended audience. Select these influencers based on their connectivity with travelers. Trust metrics, such as engagement rates, sentiment analysis, and follower growth, are essential for evaluating the effectiveness of content and refining strategy. Understanding passenger segmentation and customizing content enhances trust-building efforts. Training employees in ethical content creation and trust-building is indispensable for digital consistency and success. Understanding customer preferences, embracing new platforms and technology, and keeping up with industry advancements are necessary to maintain competitiveness. To mitigate reputational

damage, formulate a crisis management strategy and respond promptly and openly to trust-related concerns. Building relationships with clients and followers on social media is essential to establishing trust, but it takes time. Maintaining credibility and producing superior content should be top priorities. Long-term success in this dynamic digital environment requires adaptability and a willingness to attempt new things. Creating trust on social media through exceptional content is an ongoing process. Managers in the travel industry must monitor industry developments and be prepared for problems, in addition to investing in content creation, authenticity, and engagement. Continuously establishing trust can increase business success and customer loyalty.

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