

Role of Social Media in Promoting Tourism: A Study with Special Reference to Prayagraj

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Abstract: Social media has emerged as a powerful digital medium for communication, information exchange, and user-generated content, transforming the way tourism destinations are promoted and experienced. The interactive nature of social-media platforms enables tourism organisations and travellers to create, share, evaluate, and disseminate destination-related information, thereby influencing travel information search, destination perceptions, and tourism decision-making. In this context, the present study examines the role of social media in promoting tourism in India, with particular reference to Prayagraj, an important religious, cultural, and heritage destination. The study adopts a descriptive research design and is based on primary data collected through a structured questionnaire from 392 respondents aged above 20 years. The analysis focuses on respondents' preferred tourism advertising platforms, daily social-media usage, sharing of travel experiences, and use of destination reviews before visiting a destination. The findings indicate that social media was identified as the most appealing tourism advertising platform by 67.1% of respondents. Further, 64.25% of respondents reported that they share their travel experiences on social media, while 68.8% indicated that they check destination-related reviews before visiting a destination. These findings suggest that social media functions not only as a promotional channel but also as an important source of tourism information, electronic word-of-mouth, experience sharing, and destination evaluation. In the context of Prayagraj, the study highlights the potential of social media to enhance destination visibility and facilitate greater engagement between tourists and tourism stakeholders. However, the findings are descriptive and should not be interpreted as evidence of a causal relationship between social-media use and tourism growth. The study contributes to the understanding of social media as an increasingly relevant instrument for tourism promotion and destination communication in Prayagraj.

Keywords: Social Media, Tourism Promotion, Tourism Marketing, Destination Promotion, Prayagraj, Electronic Word-of-Mouth, Travel Experience.

I. Introduction

Social media has emerged as an important digital communication environment that enables users to interact, exchange information, create content, and share experiences. Built upon the principles of Web 2.0, social-media platforms have transformed users from passive recipients of information into active participants in the creation and dissemination of content (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). This participatory nature has particularly significant implications for tourism, where information, experiences, recommendations, reviews, photographs, and videos can influence how travellers perceive and evaluate destinations. Social media has therefore become an increasingly important source of travel-related information and a significant component of contemporary tourism marketing and destination promotion (Xiang & Gretzel, 2010; Leung et al., 2013). Research has further demonstrated that electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) communicated through online platforms can influence destination image, tourist attitudes, and travel intentions (Jalilvand et al., 2012). Web 2.0 has contributed to a shift from predominantly one-way online communication towards more interactive and participatory forms of digital communication. In the tourism context, this development has enabled travellers to create, share, evaluate, and exchange travel-related information through online platforms. Consequently, social media has become relevant at

different stages of the travel decision-making process, particularly during information search, destination evaluation, experience sharing, and post-trip communication (Xiang & Gretzel, 2010; Leung et al., 2013). From the tourism-marketing perspective, this transformation has enabled destinations and tourism organisations to communicate directly with potential visitors while also benefiting from user-generated content and electronic word-of-mouth. Thus, social media represents not merely an additional promotional channel but an interactive environment in which tourism information is produced, circulated, evaluated, and consumed by both organisations and travellers.

The increasing adoption of social-media platforms has transformed the way tourism-related information is created, communicated, and consumed. Unlike traditional promotional media, social media facilitates two-way and multi-directional communication, allowing tourism organisations to disseminate destination information while enabling tourists to generate and share their own content. Such user-generated content can contribute to the construction of destination images and influence how potential tourists perceive a destination (Garay, 2019; Liu et al., 2024). The interactive characteristics of social media also enable tourism marketers to engage with audiences, respond to travellers' information needs, and encourage the circulation of destination-related content. Consequently, social media has evolved from being merely a communication channel into an important component of destination marketing and image formation (Molinillo et al., 2018; Khatoon & Choudhary, 2024). Social media has also changed the nature of communication between tourism organisations and travellers by creating opportunities for continuous interaction and engagement. Through platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, and other social-networking services, destination marketing organisations can disseminate information about attractions, cultural experiences, events, accommodation, cuisine, and local activities while simultaneously receiving feedback from users. Unlike traditional promotional media, social media allows tourists to participate in destination communication by creating, commenting on, reviewing, and sharing tourism-related content. This interaction can strengthen engagement between destinations and potential visitors and can contribute to the development of destination-related perceptions and electronic word-of-mouth (Gálvez-Rodríguez et al., 2020; Abbasi et al., 2023). Research focusing specifically on Indian destination marketing organisations has also found that tourism departments use social-media platforms such as Facebook to promote destinations, with visual and informative content related to scenic beauty, culture, and cuisine generating comparatively high user engagement (Patil & Choudhary, 2022). Social media has increasingly facilitated a shift from conventional one-way destination promotion towards interactive and participatory tourism communication. Tourism organisations can use social-media platforms to provide destination-related information, while travellers can simultaneously evaluate, comment on, recommend, and share their experiences with other users. This reciprocal exchange is particularly important in tourism because travellers often seek information from other consumers before making destination-related decisions. User-generated content and electronic word-of-mouth can therefore complement information provided by tourism organisations and influence tourists' perceptions and behavioural intentions (Bilgihan et al., 2016; Jalilvand et al., 2012). Recent research further suggests that social-media marketing activities such as interaction, entertainment, trendiness, and word-of-mouth can influence destination-choice behaviour, particularly among younger travellers (Liu et al., 2023). Thus, effective tourism promotion through social media requires not only the dissemination of promotional information but also the creation of opportunities for tourists to interact, share experiences, and contribute to the digital representation of destinations. In the Indian tourism context, social media has become an increasingly relevant instrument for destination promotion and tourist engagement. India's tourism organisations increasingly use digital platforms to communicate destination attributes, cultural experiences, attractions, and events to potential visitors. Empirical research on Indian Destination Marketing Organizations (DMOs) demonstrates that social-media platforms are being used strategically for destination promotion, with visual and informative content related to scenic beauty, culture, and cuisine generating substantial user engagement (Chandrasekaran et al., 2023). A cross-platform study of 16 official Indian DMOs further found that interactive posts generated the highest engagement on Facebook, while informative posts performed particularly well on Twitter, highlighting the importance of adapting tourism content to the characteristics of different social-media platforms (Chandrasekaran et al., 2023).

Prayagraj is an important religious, cultural, and heritage destination in Uttar Pradesh, with major attractions associated with the Sangam, religious traditions, historical sites, and large-scale cultural events such as the Kumbh Mela. The increasing use of digital media has created new opportunities for communicating the city's tourism resources to potential visitors. The Government of India has specifically promoted Mahakumbh 2025 in Prayagraj through social media, digital brochures, travel bloggers, influencers, YouTubers, photographers, and collaborative promotional activities with tourism organisations. Recent academic research focusing specifically on the 2025 Prayagraj Kumbh Mela also demonstrates the relevance of social-media content to the tourism experience: informativeness, visual appeal, and entertainment in social-media content were found to significantly influence event attachment and, indirectly, young tourists' spiritual well-being. These developments indicate that social

media has become increasingly relevant to the communication and promotion of Prayagraj as a tourism destination. Although previous studies have established the importance of social media in tourism information search, destination image formation, tourist engagement, and electronic word-of-mouth, limited attention has been given to the broader role of social media in promoting Prayagraj as a tourism destination beyond individual mega-events such as the Kumbh Mela. Existing Prayagraj-focused research has primarily examined social-media content in the context of the 2025 Kumbh Mela, leaving scope to understand tourists' broader perceptions and use of social media for destination promotion. Therefore, the present study examines the role of social media in tourism promotion in Prayagraj by considering respondents' preferences for tourism advertising channels, social-media usage, sharing of travel experiences, and use of destination reviews.

II. Objectives of the Study

- To examine the relationship between social media and tourism marketing.
- To examine the role of social media in promoting tourism in India, with particular reference to Prayagraj.
- To assess respondents' engagement with social media in relation to tourism-related information and activities.
- To examine the perceived significance of social media as a channel for tourism advertising, travel-experience sharing, and destination reviews.

III. Review of Related Literature

Social media has substantially changed the tourism information environment by enabling tourists to search for, evaluate, create, and share travel-related information. Xiang and Gretzel (2010) demonstrated the growing presence of social-media content in online travel information searches, highlighting its importance as a source of information for potential tourists. Similarly, Leung et al. (2013), through a review of the tourism and hospitality literature, identified social media as an important tool for communication, marketing, information exchange, and consumer engagement. Bilgihan et al. (2016) further showed that travel-related online social networks facilitate knowledge sharing among consumers. Collectively, these studies indicate that social media has moved beyond being a supplementary communication medium and has become an important part of the tourism information and decision-making environment.

A second major theme in the literature concerns the influence of social media on destination image and tourists' travel intentions. Jalilvand et al. (2012) found that electronic word-of-mouth is significantly associated with destination image, tourists' attitudes towards a destination, and travel intention. Similarly, Molinillo et al. (2018) demonstrated that destination marketing organisations' online platforms can contribute to destination image and tourists' intention to visit. More recent research by Liu et al. (2024) further shows that social-media affordances can influence both the cognitive and affective dimensions of destination image. Garay (2019), through an analysis of destination-related social-media content, also demonstrated how user-generated content contributes to the construction of tourists' perceptions of a destination. These studies collectively suggest that social media can influence tourism promotion not only by disseminating information but also by shaping how destinations are perceived by potential visitors.

Social-media engagement is another important dimension of tourism promotion because tourists are not only recipients of destination information but also active contributors to its online visibility. Munar and Jacobsen (2014) found that tourists share travel experiences through social media for reasons including social interaction, self-expression, and sharing information with others. Similarly, Bilgihan et al. (2016) highlighted the importance of online social networks for travel-related knowledge sharing. More recent research has shown that the value of tourism-related social-media images can encourage consumer engagement and electronic word-of-mouth (Abbasi et al., 2023). These findings suggest that tourists' willingness to share experiences and interact with destination-related content can extend the reach of tourism promotion beyond content directly produced by tourism organisations.

Research in the Indian tourism context further indicates that social media is being used by Destination Marketing Organizations (DMOs) as a tool for destination communication and audience engagement. Chandrasekaran et al. (2023) found that Indian DMOs use Facebook to promote destination attributes such as scenic beauty, culture, and cuisine, with visual and informative content generating considerable engagement. Their subsequent cross-platform study showed that the effectiveness of tourism content varies across social-media platforms, with interactive content performing strongly on Facebook and informative content receiving greater engagement on Twitter (Chandrasekaran et al., 2023). More recently, research on the 2025 Prayagraj Kumbh Mela has examined how the informativeness, visual appeal, and entertainment value of social-media content influence tourists' event-related responses (Kumar et al., 2026). These studies demonstrate the growing relevance of social media in Indian

destination promotion while also indicating the need for further research on its broader role in promoting individual destinations such as Prayagraj beyond specific tourism events.

IV. Research Gap

Although previous studies have established that social media can facilitate tourism information search, destination-image formation, tourist engagement, experience sharing, and electronic word-of-mouth, the existing literature provides comparatively limited evidence on how social media is perceived and used for the broader promotion of Prayagraj as a tourism destination. Recent Prayagraj-focused research has largely examined social-media content in the context of the 2025 Kumbh Mela, rather than the wider range of tourism attractions and promotional activities associated with the city. Therefore, the present study seeks to examine the role of social media in promoting tourism in Prayagraj, with particular attention to respondents' social-media engagement, preferred tourism advertising channels, sharing of travel experiences, and use of destination reviews.

V. Methodology

5.1 Research Design and Data Collection

The study adopts a descriptive research design to examine the role of social media in promoting tourism, with particular reference to Prayagraj. The study is based on both primary and secondary data. Primary data were collected through a structured survey of 392 respondents aged above 20 years. Secondary information was obtained from books, academic journals, magazines, newspapers, tourism reports, and relevant online sources.

5.2 Sampling and Respondents

The primary data for the study were collected through a survey of 392 respondents aged above 20 years. The respondents comprised 239 males and 153 females. The study therefore uses the responses of 392 participants as the empirical basis for examining social-media use in relation to tourism promotion.

5.3 Data Sources

The study draws on two sources of data. Primary data were obtained through the survey of 392 adults, while secondary data were collected from books, journals, magazines, newspapers, articles, annual tourism reports, and Internet sources.

5.4 Questionnaire and Measures

The primary data were collected through a structured questionnaire designed to obtain information about respondents' social-media use in relation to tourism promotion. The questionnaire covered respondents' preferred tourism advertising platform, the amount of time spent on social media, their tendency to post or share travel experiences, and whether they check destination-related reviews before travelling. The responses to these questions form the basis of the descriptive analysis presented in the study.

5.5 Statistical Analysis

The collected responses were analysed using descriptive statistics, primarily frequencies and percentages, to identify patterns in respondents' social-media usage and tourism-related behaviour. The results are presented through tables showing the distribution of responses for the four principal questions examined in the study.

VI. Results and Analysis

6.1 Preferred Tourism Advertising Platform

The first finding examines respondents' perceptions of the most appealing platform for tourism advertising. Social media was identified as the most appealing advertising platform by 67.1% of respondents, indicating a strong preference for social-media-based tourism promotion. The finding suggests that social-media platforms may provide tourism marketers with an effective means of reaching potential tourists and communicating destination-related information.

Table 1: Most Appealing Advertising Platform for Tourism

Advertising Platform	Percentage
Social media	67.1%
Other platforms	32.9%

Source: Primary Data

6.2 Time Spent on Social Media

Table 2 examines the amount of time respondents spend on social media each day. Among the 392 respondents, 143 (36.5%) reported spending more than five hours per day on social media, representing the largest category. This was followed by 69 respondents (17.6%) who reported spending 2–3 hours, 58 (14.8%) spending 1–2 hours, 51 (13%) spending 3–4 hours, 39 (10%) spending 4–5 hours, and 32 (8.2%) spending less than one hour per day. The finding indicates a high level of social-media exposure among the respondents, providing tourism marketers with considerable potential to reach audiences through social-media platforms. However, the descriptive data alone do not establish that longer social-media use causes greater tourism engagement.

Table 2: Daily Time Spent by Respondents on Social Media

Daily social-media use	Respondents	Percentage
Below 1 hour	32	8.2%
1–2 hours	58	14.8%
2–3 hours	69	17.6%
3–4 hours	51	13.0%
4–5 hours	39	10.0%
5+ hours	143	36.5%
Total	392	100%

Source: Primary Data

6.3 Respondents' Sharing of Travel Experiences on Social Media

Table 3 examines whether respondents post or share their travel experiences on social-media platforms. Of the 392 respondents, 135 (34.45%) strongly agreed that they post about their travel experiences, while 117 (29.8%) agreed. Thus, 64.25% of respondents expressed agreement with the statement. A further 69 respondents (17.6%) were neutral, while 52 (13.3%) disagreed and 19 (4.8%) strongly disagreed. The results indicate that a substantial proportion of respondents actively share their travel experiences through social media. Such user-generated travel content can contribute to the online visibility of destinations by allowing tourists to communicate their experiences with other users.

Table 3: Respondents' Sharing of Travel Experiences on Social Media

Response	Respondents	Percentage
Strongly Agree	135	34.45%
Agree	117	29.8%
Neutral	69	17.6%
Disagree	52	13.3%
Strongly Disagree	19	4.8%
Total	392	100%

Source: Primary Data

Table 4 examines whether respondents check destination-related reviews on social media before visiting a particular destination. Among the 392 respondents, 153 (39.0%) strongly agreed and 117 (29.8%) agreed that they check reviews before visiting. Thus, 68.8% of respondents expressed agreement with the statement. A further 75 respondents (19.1%) were neutral, while 28 (7.1%) disagreed and 19 (4.8%) strongly disagreed. The finding suggests that destination reviews constitute an important source of information for a substantial proportion of respondents when considering a visit. This is consistent with the wider tourism literature, which identifies online reviews and electronic word-of-mouth as important components of tourists' information-search and destination-evaluation processes.

Table 4: Respondents' Use of Destination Reviews on Social Media Before Visiting

Response	Respondents	Percentage
Strongly Agree	153	39.0%
Agree	117	29.8%
Neutral	75	19.1%
Disagree	28	7.1%
Strongly Disagree	19	4.8%
Total	392	100%

Source: Primary Data

VII. Discussion

The findings indicate that social media has considerable relevance to tourism promotion among the respondents. A majority identified social media as the most appealing tourism advertising platform, while a substantial proportion reported spending several hours per day on social-media platforms. The results also show active participation in tourism-related content creation, with many respondents reporting that they share their travel experiences online. In addition, destination reviews appear to be an important source of information, as a majority of respondents indicated that they check reviews before visiting a destination. Taken together, these findings suggest that social media functions not only as a channel for tourism advertising but also as an interactive space where tourists obtain information and contribute their own experiences and evaluations. These findings broadly correspond with earlier research showing that social media has become an important source of travel information and tourism-related knowledge sharing (Xiang & Gretzel, 2010; Leung et al., 2013; Bilgihan et al., 2016). The importance of travel experience sharing is also consistent with Munar and Jacobsen (2014), while the relevance of online reviews and electronic word-of-mouth is supported by Jalilvand et al. (2012).

VIII. Conclusion

The study concludes that social media has an important role in contemporary tourism promotion, particularly as a platform for advertising, information sharing, travel-experience sharing, and destination evaluation. The findings show that 67.1% of respondents identified social media as the most appealing tourism advertising platform, while a substantial proportion reported using social media extensively and engaging with travel-related content. Moreover, 68.8% of respondents indicated that they check destination reviews on social media before visiting, highlighting the relevance of user-generated information in tourism-related decision-making. In the context of Prayagraj, these findings suggest that social media can provide tourism stakeholders with an accessible channel for communicating destination information and encouraging visitors to share their experiences. However, the findings should be interpreted as descriptive evidence of respondents' perceptions and behaviours rather than proof of a causal effect of social media on tourist visits or tourism growth.

IX. Practical Implications

The findings have practical implications for tourism stakeholders in Prayagraj. Tourism authorities and destination marketers can use social-media platforms to disseminate destination information, promote attractions, and encourage tourists to share their travel experiences. Since a substantial proportion of respondents reported checking destination reviews before visiting, tourism organisations may also benefit from encouraging authentic visitor-generated content and maintaining an active presence on relevant social-media platforms. However, promotional content should be informative and credible, as tourists increasingly encounter destination information through peer-generated content and online reviews.

X. Limitations and Future Research Directions

The study has certain limitations. The analysis is based on 392 respondents and primarily employs descriptive statistics, which limits the extent to which the findings can be generalised or used to establish causal relationships. In addition, the study focuses on selected aspects of social-media use in tourism and does not examine differences across individual social-media platforms or other factors that may influence tourists' destination decisions. Future studies could use larger and more diverse samples and employ inferential or comparative methods to examine the relationship between social-media engagement, destination perception, and tourism-related decision-making in greater depth.

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