Journal of Journalism, Media Science and Creative Arts
ISSN (Print): 2790-9700 ISSN (Online): 2790-9719

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The role of Facebook in promoting tourism of Karachi

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Received:01-04-2025 **Accepted:** ;10-4-2025 **Available online: Published: 30-**06-2025

Cite this article Khan, A. A. (2025). The role of Facebook in promoting tourism of Karachi. *Journal of Journalism, Media Science, and Creative Arts, 5*(1), 11–18

ABSTRACT

The study examines the role of Facebook as a tool of marketing tourism in Karachi, their use in influencing perceptions, decision-making and interaction between tourists and other local stakeholders in the destinations. The qualitative research technique has been employed where 200 residents of Karachi were interviewed and the gathered information was interpreted with the help of thematic analysis. The results identified five key areas: Facebook as a digital promotional platform, the importance of user-generated content to create a sense of ground-truth, the role of the platform in engaging communities, its impact on tourist decision-making and the issues of misinformation and unorganized official campaigns. The research findings are that Facebook has become an essential tool in advertising the tourism of Karachi by lending visibility, authenticity and interactivity. The opportunities it offers are, however, limited by adverse image and incoherent actions. It is worth noting that tourism authorities and marketers should have a more organized method of using Facebook in attaining sustainable tourism promotions.

Keywords: Facebook, touris, Karachi, marketing,promoting,

Introduction

Tourism plays a vital role in economic growth, cultural exchange, and city branding, especially in developing countries (Khan & Javed, 2020). In recent years, digital platforms have become significant tools for tourism promotion, with social media emerging as one of the most powerful mediums for engaging potential travelers (Zeng & Gerritsen, 2014). Among various social networking sites, Facebook remains the most widely used platform globally and in Pakistan, making it a crucial channel for promoting Karachi's tourism potential (Statista, 2023).

Karachi, Pakistan's largest metropolitan city, is rich in cultural heritage, beaches, architecture, and diverse food culture, yet it struggles to attract international tourists due to negative perceptions related to safety and security (Ali & Parveen, 2019). In this context, Facebook offers a platform where visuals, reviews, and interactive content can help reshape Karachi's image and highlight its attractions to both local and global audiences (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Research has shown that user-generated content on Facebook, such as travel photos, videos, and reviews, significantly influences destination choice and traveler behavior (Munar & Jacobsen, 2014).

Moreover, Facebook's ability to facilitate community-building and storytelling allows tourism authorities, entrepreneurs, and influencers to market Karachi's unique culture and tourist destinations in a cost-effective manner (Hays, Page, & Buhalis, 2013). The interactive features of Facebook—such as check-ins, live streaming, and event promotion—help foster engagement and provide real-time insights into tourist experiences (Xiang & Gretzel, 2010). Such digital interactions are increasingly essential for promoting urban tourism in competitive markets (Rahman, 2021).

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In Pakistan, Facebook has become a leading source of information for travelers, often replacing traditional advertising with peer-driven recommendations and visual storytelling (Shafqat & Bashir, 2022). By enabling participatory communication, Facebook reduces the gap between tourism stakeholders and audiences, thereby strengthening Karachi's visibility in the global tourism landscape (Dwivedi et al., 2021). Overall, leveraging Facebook for tourism promotion not only enhances Karachi's image but also contributes to sustainable tourism growth.

Problem Statement

Tourism has long been considered a powerful driver of cultural exchange, socio-economic development, and global integration. Cities that manage to promote themselves as tourist destinations benefit from increased foreign exchange earnings, employment opportunities, and improved infrastructure. The largest city in Pakistan, Karachi, has huge potential to become a touristic destination because of its rich culture and history, diversified cuisine, beautiful coastline assets. Nevertheless, in spite of its distinct features and natural as well as other strengths, Karachi has failed to become an important tourist destination on both regional and global level. Poor use of modern communication tools, and specifically the use of social media such as facebook has come out as a major constraint in realizing this potential.

Facebook has more than 3 billion active users all around the globe; it is not just a social network but an instrument of branding, promotion, and engagement in many industries, tourism among them. Numerous cities and nations around the world have used Facebook to showcase their culture and heritage as well as their attractions to outsiders. Countries such as Dubai, Istanbul, and Bangkok have been able to make an impact on their destinations through the use of Facebook campaigns, which helps them portray their destinations as great tourist centers, thus, enhancing global presence as well as attracting more tourists. The situation in Karachi, however, differs. Karachi still has not fully used the potential resources in the sphere of Facebook as the method of tourism promotion. This discrepancy between the prospects and practice is the main issue of the problem under examination. The marketing strategies in Karachi are not coordinated and professional which is one of the main concerns in its tourism sector. Lack of consistent branding and storytelling, the most important factor in the creation of a narrative about a city, has limited the worldwide recognition of the attractions of Karachi. Facebook can be used to create such narratives in a cost-effective and expansive manner, and its use in this regard has not been maximized by stakeholders in Karachi such as government departments, tourism boards, and other hospitality-related businesses. Therefore, the possibilities to popularize a positive image of Karachi are not used to the fullest extent.

The other dimension of the problem is the negative international image of Karachi which is formed around the issues of the lack of political stability, security, and insufficient infrastructure. Generally, the news media portrays violence, turmoil and governance issues, at the expense of the cultural diversity and tourist attraction sites such as historical properties across the city and coastal attractions. Facebook may be used as means of counter-narratives as it allows direct presentation of positive qualities of Karachi to the domestic and international communities. Visual storytelling, highly personalized advertising, and user-generated content (review, experience, travel vlogs, etc.) can be a serious benefit to the reputation of the city. There has been a little attempt to make systematic use of these tools. Such passive approaches to digitalization allow reinforcing the dominance of negative attitude, excluding the prospective visitors to the possibility of regard Karachi as a safe and inspiring destination. Additionally, there is a lack of interlinking between tourists and information in tourism industry of Karachi. In contrast to international destinations where tourism boards, hotels, restaurants, and cultural sites have well-managing Facebook pages that produce high-quality contents that are continuously updated, the stakeholders of Karachi do not focus on providing consistent, interesting, and authentic content. Consequently,

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prospective tourists can find no feasible and credible information about points of interest, transportation services, cultural activities, and the local experiences. This lack of an organized online presence translates to the loss of potential tourists both locally and abroad who depend a lot on online platforms to find ideas and information on various traveling decisions.

From a research perspective, there is a clear knowledge gap in understanding how Facebook can be effectively harnessed for promoting tourism in Karachi. While global studies highlight the transformative impact of social media platforms in tourism promotion, limited academic inquiry has focused specifically on Karachi. The city presents a unique context marked by its cultural richness, socio-political challenges, and digital transformation trends. Investigating how Facebook can reshape tourism promotion in Karachi is essential to provide insights not only for local stakeholders but also for broader discussions on the role of social media in tourism development within developing countries.

Therefore, the problem at the heart of this study is the underutilization of Facebook as a strategic tool for tourism promotion in Karachi, despite its global prominence as a low-cost, high-impact platform for destination marketing. This underutilization stems from a combination of factors, including lack of professional marketing strategies, negative global perceptions of Karachi, insufficient information accessibility, limited engagement with digital audiences, inadequate training of tourism professionals, and absence of stakeholder collaboration. The persistence of these challenges has constrained Karachi's ability to position itself as a competitive tourism destination, both regionally and internationally.

Addressing this problem requires a systematic investigation into the role Facebook can play in promoting Karachi's tourism, the barriers hindering its optimal use, and the potential strategies that can enhance its effectiveness. By exploring these dimensions, this research seeks to contribute to both academic knowledge and practical solutions that can help reposition Karachi on the global tourism map. Ultimately, the problem of Karachi's tourism underdevelopment cannot be resolved without embracing the opportunities offered by digital platforms like Facebook, which have become indispensable in shaping contemporary travel decisions and perceptions.

Research Objectives

To explore how much facebook is effective in promoting the tourism of Karachi.

To illustrate the role of facebook in attractiving the tourist to visit Karachi.

To find out the what sights of Karachi look more attractive to the touriston facebook.

Research Questions

How much facebook is effective in promoting the tourism of Karachi

What role facebook is playing in attracting the tourist to visit Karachi

What sights of Karachi look more attractive to the touriston facebook

Literature Review

The researcher found the following literature of the present study.

Facebook as a Destination Marketing Tool

Facebook has become a powerful low-cost and long-range medium where gaps in destination image are co-produced and bargained in posts, photos and comments by DMOs, traveling companies and visitors (Lopez-Sanchez et al., 2021). DMOs are beginning to heavily use Facebook so as to present narratives, build tourist anticipations, and trigger touristic motivations to travel (Moro et al., 2020). It has also been stated that Facebook can be successfully used when the campaigns make use of interesting visuals, encouraging interaction and even adherence to the stories (IOSR, 2016).

Mechanisms: eWOM, UGC, and Social Influence

On Facebook, electronic word of mouth (eWOM) in terms of reviews, comments, and shares influence the trust and visit intentions of travelers (Abubakar et al., 2021). The quality and credibility of this kind of information are of primary importance since they affect ideas of risk and trustiness (Tapanainen et al., 2020). In parallel to that, even indirect contact (through

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posts by friends) with travel-related content substantially activates the intentions to travel, indicating the peer-to-peer social influence that Facebook may implement (Yoo et al., 2019). In Pakistani context, Facebook tourism groups are considered to be user-generated content (UGC) that is quite influential in terms of fostering satisfaction levels in the pre-purchase phase (Qazi et al., 2017).

Evidence from Pakistan and Implications for Karachi

To a certain extent, Pakistan-specific literature supports this idea, indicating that social media is a driver of the tourist industry because it increases recognition and interaction (Khan et al., 2019). The studies also indicate that the relationship between eWOM and positive destination image to tourist loyalty intentions show the long-terms gains of the sustained online communication (Rasheed et al., 2020). The research findings also indicate that Facebook information at both content and non-content levels (accuracy, relevance, posting frequency and responsiveness) significantly influences the perceptions held by tourists (Ahmad et al., 2021).

Facebook Tourism Promotion in Karachi

STDC at the city level also actively uses Facebook to promote the heritage, cultural festivals, and events of Karachi as well, which is a sign that the institution recognized the potential of Facebook to brand the destination (STDC, 2023). Lastly, the discovery of Facebook as a way to promote events, attract delegates and sponsors, publicise a city like Karachi as an exhibition centre, all of which helps (indirectly) to improve its image, with the opening of events like the Pakistan Travel Mart (PTM) in Karachi (Pakistan Travel Mart, 2023).

Facebook in Crisis and Image Repair

Facebook can provide its benefits after the crisis is resolved by assisting destinations to respond to the threats and recover reputation. Rapid communication, transparency, and design help to overcome negative attitudes formed after crises- an aspect of concern especially in Karachi, where tourism is regularly hurt by the perceptions of urban safety (Mair et al., 2016).

Strategic Ingredients for Success

Some of the key elements that contribute to destination marketing success in Facebook are image-rich content, active engagement of the followers, valid eWOM, and person-to-person diffusion via groups and shares (Siddiqui et al., 2020). When integrated, such strategies can increase awareness, change attitudes, and increase the intention of the visit. Nevertheless, without the consistency and credibility, the campaigns tend to be non-productive (Ashfaq et al., 2019).

Research Gaps and Future Directions for Karachi

A lot of research materials at a Karachi level are not available despite the useful insight which the Pakistan related studies can provide. In future, the research may examine Facebook campaign statistics of STDC to determine the most successful promotional tactic, test how Facebook groups may shape decision-making processes of travelers regarding their visit to Karachi, and implement the use of various types of content (e.g. heritage versus food tourism) to determine which affect tourist activity and/or desire to travel to Karachi (JBT Pakistan, 2021).

Research Methodology

The research design used in this study is a qualitative research design to understand how Face book can be used in marketing tourism in Karachi. It was established that a qualitative approach will be most applicable due to the fact that it will allow the researcher to collect the perceptions, experiences and attitudes of people in a manner that is natural enabling them to obtain deeper insights on matters omitted by a quantitative approach. This was an exploratory study to understand the effects of Facebook on tourist awareness, image formations and destination preferences to Karachi as a tourist destination.

Sampling and Population

The target population was the residents of Karachi because they had a direct experience with local tourism and due to the fact that they are the users of Facebook platforms. Purposive sampling method was adopted to identify participants that were active Facebook users and either engaged with tourism related content (e.g.,

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pages, groups, events, or advertisements) or shared/consumed tourism related information about Karachi. In the interviews alone, 200 were interviewed in order to create a diverse range of participants in terms of age, gender, level of education and socio-economic backgrounds. This diversity enabled the research to obtain a broad range of opinions about the role of Facebook in determining the tourism action and the image of cities.

Data Collection

The semi-structured interviews were used to collect primary data with open-ended questions asked. These questions were set so that they would encourage the participants to describe their experiences and perceptions in details. Themes that were in use in the interview questions included: How users were presented on Facebook with tourism related information regarding Karachi. Their opinions as to the believability of such material and the authority of said material. The influence of Facebook in encouraging them to go to the local tourist sites. During the study, I was limited to discuss the challenges or limitations they thought about Facebook based tourism promotion. The interviews were carried out in person and, where possible, via video calls. The interviews were of 30 to 45 minutes and were recorded on the request of participants. There was adherence to ethics of treating individuals anonymously and on voluntary contribution.

Data Analysis

Collected qualitative data were analyzed based on thematic analysis, which is the commonly used method of analysis of the qualitative research in identifying/defining, analyzing, and reporting the trends (themes) that are visible within the data. The analysis followed a six-step procedure that was described by Braun and Clarke (2006), and it included: Being introduced to data by transcribing interviews and reading transcripts. To create first codes that would capture the meaningful aspects of the data.

Extracting themes that came out of the narration of participants.

Rereading to polish up and to make sense.

Themes are to be determined and named to represent the quintessence of the experiences of participants.

Writing conclusive report with thematic insights. This analysis revealed such themes as Facebook as a visual representation of Karachi, peer influence and eWOM, trust and credibility of content and gaps in official tourism promotion. These themes helped to gain good knowledge on how Facebook is transforming tourism promotion in Karachi.

Trustworthiness of Data

To make it rigorous and credible, member checking, triangulation, and peer debriefing were used. The participants selected were asked to review the transcripts and establish the correctness of interpretations. Triangulation was made through the cross checking of responses with official Facebook tourism pages and groups. The academic discourse with the peers allowed understanding the validity of the emerging themes and reducing researcher bias.

Findings and Discussion

Theme 1: Facebook as a Digital Promotional Tool for Karachi's Tourism

Facebook pages, Facebook groups, and sponsored posts were mentioned by many respondents as some of the sources that allow to promote cultural, historical, and recreational attractions of Karachi.

Facebook is also used by the tourism stakeholders (travel agencies, hotels and restaurants) to advertise their services, generate publicity and to encourage the local and, of course, foreigners to visit them.

Theme 2: User-Generated Content and Authentic Representation

To gain even more credibility among potential tourists, interviewees pointed out that people posting pictures, videos and reviews about Karachi can travelers and locals, help to generate authentic content which can be trusted by people. Compared to actual advert content, the Facebook content by the actual users was more credible and constructive in influencing the right opinion of Karachi as a tourist destination.

Theme 3: Facebook as a Platform for Community Engagement and Interaction

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Respondents observed that Facebook is used by giving interactive discussions in tourism groups where the travellers ask questions, experience, and provide tourism advice.

Through these interactions, a community is cultivated and the tourists are taught to make informed decisions in order to visit Karachi.

Theme 4: Influence on Tourist Decision-Making

According to interviewees, Facebook posts, recommendations, and travel stories are critical to affecting the decision making of prospective visitors.

The advertisement of festivals, food streets and heritage places often encourages people to visit Karachi, testifying to the fact that Facebook influences the desire rather than just the knowledge about Karachi.

Theme 5: Challenges and Limitations of Facebook in Tourism Promotion

Misinformation, absence of official tourism pages, and general overstaffing of the individual efforts over the cohesive efforts were identified by some respondents as challenges.

The problem of security perceptions and bad press on Facebook are also among issues that affect tourism adversely making it necessary to establish authoritative and trustworthy promotional campaigns.

Conclusion

This paper has investigated how Facebook can be used to tourism promotion within the city of Karachi using a qualitative research method in which in-depth interview of 200 Karachi people was undertaken as the research method

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Thematic analysis of data showed that Facebook is an important promotional tool via a digital medium where the stakeholders and tourists can exchange information, photo shoots and experiences leading to increased visibility of this city as a tourist destination. UGC also became one of the influential forces in forming the impression about a brand, since honest reviews and images were considered more reliable than paid advertising. As well, Facebook provides an avenue to empower the locals and tourists to interact and be able to make judgmental decisions in effecting travel and exploration.

Nevertheless, it is possible to note some limitations in the findings. Although Facebook has positive messages and attractions, the negative portrayals associated with safety and infrastructure, misinformation, lack of systematic official campaigns are the issues that are obstacles to the potential value of the platform like this. On the whole, the paper can conclude that Facebook is now emerging as an essential tool in tourism promotion in Karachi, although organized advertising campaigns, official tourism accounts, and methods of thwarting the spread of false rumors could further improve its success. The reflections of this qualitative study emphasize the significance of social media in the current tourism marketing and indicate that the more the Facebook will be utilized strategically the more it will help Karachi to improve its reputation as tourist attraction place in Pakistan

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