

---

**From Fears to Tours: A Surge in KP Tourism Through Social Media**Dr. Nasim Khan Mahsud\*<sup>1</sup>, Dr. Asad Munir<sup>2</sup>

---

**Original Article**

1. Assistant Professor, Department of Sociology, Allama Iqbal Open University, Islamabad-Pakistan. Corresponding Author: nasim.khan@aiou.edu.pk
2. Lecturer, Department of Mass Communication, Allama Iqbal Open University, Islamabad-Pakistan

**Abstract**

*Khyber Pakhtunkhwa has undoubtedly been the most beautiful federal unit of Pakistan. Blessed with the crystal-clear glaciers, whispering pines, rocky mountains, roaring rivers and lush green meadows, this land has always been a jewel of the eye for emperors and rulers the world over, and the conflicting situation remained there till a few years back. With reference to the worth of swat valley and overall KP, fewer researchers have emphasized the relevance of the regional community that faced violence and the wider tourist supplies and tourism activities that how the tourism sector has been affected, and what has been changed in the last few years in the region and in the lives of local communities. A huge surge in social media marketing has been observed in recent years promoting tourism in the KP after a devastating instability due to the fear and terrorism in the region. This study primarily focuses on the recent development through survey research and perception analysis of 188 social media consumers keeping in view the study objectives including, an assessment of the impact of recent years' violence on the local community, by evaluating the role of social media use for promotion of tourism in KP and suggest more effective use of social media for sustainable growth of tourism industry for the uplift of local communities.*

**Keywords:** Violence, instability, social media, tourism, local communities, sustainable development

**Introduction**

Tourism becomes a great source of annual earning, cultural exchange, economic growth, jobs for the local community, infrastructure development, employment opportunities, exchange of goods, and foreign exchange nationwide. But somehow Pakistan had faced some issues in the tourism industry particularly in the KP region affecting our tourism industry and in recent past years, there have been some security conditions which somehow created problems for the international as well as local travelers as. Potential of social networking sites (SNS) is globally acknowledged for their influence on perceptions, beliefs, attitudes and eventually in the behavioural attribution as the McLuhan (1964) said "Medium is the Message".

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa has undoubtedly been the most beautiful federal unit of Pakistan. Blessed with the crystal-clear glaciers, whispering pines, rocky mountains, roaring rivers and lush green meadows, this land has always been a jewel of the eye for emperors and rulers the world over, and the conflicting situation remained there till a few years back. A huge surge in social media marketing has been observed in the recent years promoting tourism in the KP after a devastating instability due to the fear and terrorism in the region. This study primarily focuses on the recent development through a survey and perception analysis of social media consumers.

**Objectives**

- To analyze the salience of different social media outlets in tour planning to different regions of KP.  
To examine the effectiveness of Social Media in promoting KP Tourism.
- To probe the public perception regarding the social media surge in the recent years on in KP tourism.
- To investigate the impact of SNS in reducing fears through promoting tourism in KP?

**Literature Review**

Tourism sector is improving with the digital marketing strategies of new media. Getting information about the tourist spot and the requirement of tourist is the main objective (Serra Cantalops & Salvi, 2014). Communication technologies are very useful for promotional activities; tourism is more relying on social media nowadays. Social media is playing huge role in destination marketing; it has strengthened the business of travelling and collaborating better with the tourist as their customers. Moreover, these travelling agencies are also offering rather cheap packages for the sake of promoting tourisms and of course to increase their own business by using latest marketing strategies. From the perspective of destinations and service providers of these destinations, social media enables easy access to a wider range and variety of potential visitors at a relatively low cost, thus increasing the efficiency of their marketing strategies. Social media is giving information about rather unknown and less frequent visited destinations to the hobbyist travelers. These exciting offers of Social media are very helpful for tourists for various activities to plan the trip, to select the destination, to book the vehicle. Not only for planning phase these services are provided during the trip for various on spot activities that cannot be plan in advance. Another feature offered by tour operators which is gaining popularity is holiday's package. There is a remarkable percentage of people who are consulting these tourist sites and social media pages to check new packages before planning the trips. In Pakistan, a study held in December 2020 showed that more than 70% of travellers were using social media for the information about different places prior to visit (Malik, Naseeb, Dogar, Shah, & Ali, 2020).

Tourism services are also helping in building relationship between tourist and local members of the visiting destination through interaction by social media as well as face to face interaction which further helps in promoting business deals. This is a good way of strengthening local businesses and overall economic development of the country (Hussain, Social Media Impact on Tourism in Pakistan, 2020).

Travelers rely vigorously on consumer-generated online information when making travel-related decisions. Travel-related Social Media (TSM) users can give their opinions, reviews, and sometimes suggestions about a particular place, be it a hotel or an airline. Apart from this, they can also leave their comments (Nusair, Bilgihan, & Okumus, 2013). People find such reviews to be extremely trustworthy (Yoo, Lee, Gretzel, & Fesenmaier, 2009).

It is noted that variety of information generated by users of social media, experiences of other tourist, their opinion, videos, photos, reviews, and other stuff is very helpful towards travel decisions (Yoo, Lee, Gretzel, & Fesenmaier, 2009). It can also be a part of marketing tool as far as travel companies are concerned. People are always curious to find out other people views and reviews about any visiting point, reliability of the website or social media pages is also take part in this process (Nusair, Bilgihan, & Okumus, 2013).

The trend of heavy reliance on travel related online opinions, reviews, comments and related stuff. Tourism industry in Pakistan is making the marketing techniques more impressive and better. Pakistan is a very beautiful country which has a very eye catchy landscape, the trend of tourism is increasing with the exposure toward travelling information. so this is the need of time to compete with the global standard to also gain international level of interest and attraction toward our country. Sometimes lack of proper guideline and misinformation creates huge problem for the tourist. Concerned agencies and companies should focus to improve the quality of services and reliable information to get trust of interested tourists (Crooks et al., 2013). Improved standard of promotional and persuasive stuff, travel guides, credibility of information is much needed (Sussman & Siegal).

This is already acknowledged that social media has turned the trends of tourism and giving variety of information for making the decisions. Tourism sector is providing services to the vacationers a lot of recent studies are focusing (Rodríguez-Díaz, Rodríguez-Díaz, & Espino-Rodríguez, 2018).

And the interest of people toward travelling and using social media during holidays is notably increasing. Internet has become their planning agent (Dergiades, Mavragani, & Pan, 2018).

Pakistan tourism agencies have a big challenge to portray the positive image of Pakistan as a safe country to visit. With the increase in social media usage the importance of tourism and related information cannot be ignored. Various famous personalities are also contributing in this area with the help of vlogs, blogs. Moreover tourist organizations are sponsoring famous people and giving them free visits. They make videos and vlogs while travelling so the visited place, any hotel or local product can be advertise and becomes known and famous. But still Pakistan has to do a lot of work to meet international standards (Khan, Ali, Zada, Saeed, & Zada, 2022).

Most of the people show great interest in social media channels to seek information in planning their trips and they are of the view that social media is contributing affectively especially through the pictorial display of the prospect destinations. The government should just add to it by ensuring safety and security, health facilities, healthy food and some very serious initiatives to control pollution. Strict law enforcement is required. Besides, the government should focus on the strength and scope of social media outlets for targeting the tourism development especially to attract the foreign tourists (Hussain, 2021).

### Research Questions

1. Are the SNS an important source of tourism related information in Pakistan?
2. How do the social media facilitate tourists in planning their trips to KP?
3. How social media platforms are used by travelers to inspire the prospect tourists to visit different regions of KP?
4. Whether and to what extent are the tour planners utilizing the potential of SNS to visit KP?
5. Whether and to what extent the recent surge on SNS helps reducing the fears through promotion of tourism in KP region?

### Hypothesis

**H<sub>1</sub>:** It is more likely that the extent of reliance on social networking sites leads to attitudinal change in tour planning.

**H<sub>0</sub>:** There is no correlation between reliance on social networking sites and attitudinal change for tour planning.

### Research Methodology

The researchers used the quantitative method with survey methodology. A comprehensive questionnaire was constructed on Google Forms as the major tool which was disseminated to all the contacts on Facebook, Twitter, and WhatsApp. A purposive sample of 385 respondents was considered adequate by using the Sample Size Calculator of SurveyMonkey.com with 5% margin of error and 95% confidence level. The purpose was to acquire the responses of social media users of different psychographics and demographics. Respondents were given two reminders to fill in the particulars over the period of two weeks; by the end of which a total of 188 responses were received. Data was analyzed with the descriptive statistical procedures to seek answers of the research questions.

### Major Findings

#### Use of Social Media for Tourism

Variable	n	Percentage
Consumed social media for tourism information	188	Agreed (78%) Disagreed (12%) Neutral (10%)
Consulted social media for tour planning	188	Agreed (92%) Disagreed (6%) Neutral (1%)
Usefulness of SNS for travel planning	188	Agreed (94%) Disagreed (6%) Neutral (0%)
What inspires you most on social media to finalize your destination?	188	Pictures/Videos posted by friends (28%) Youtube Vlogs (36%) Posts of Celebrities (6%) Other (1%) Tour Operator Ads (29%)

#### Reliance on Social Media for Tourism

Variables	n	Percentage
Believe that tourism companies are effectively targeting potential tourists	188	Agreed (82%) Disagreed (11%) Neutral (7%)
Reliance on social media for tourism information	188	Agreed (82%) Disagreed (11%) Neutral (7%)
Believe that effective use of SNS reduces fears and persuades tourists	188	Agreed (88%) Disagreed (7%) Neutral (5%)
SNS help choosing the right destination	188	Agreed (92%) Disagreed (7%) Neutral (1%)
Personally experienced a trip supported through social media	188	Agreed (64%) Disagreed (31%) Neutral (5%)

**Prioritizing KP for Tourism**

	n	Percentage
Favorite tourist region after noticing it on social media platforms	188	Punjab Region (22%)
		KP Region (41%)
		Sindh Region (2%)
		Balouchistan Region (7%)
		GB Region (29%)
What is the most important factor in prioritizing KP as your destination?	188	Economy (56)
		Beauty (23%)
		Convenience (18%)
		Other (3%)
Previously held fears while visiting KP	188	Terrorism (64%)
		Language Barrier (18%)
		Culture Barrier (11%)
		Ethnic Barriers (4%)
KP govt must initiate massive social media campaign to reduce fears and promote tourism	188	Agreed (98%)
		Disagreed (2%)
		Neutral (0%)
Still have any fears in visiting KP?	188	Agreed (24%)
		Disagreed (68)
		Neutral (8%)
Local Tour operators are affectively using the potential of SNS	188	Agreed (74%)
		Disagreed (26%)
		Neutral (0%)

**Testing Null Hypothesis**

$H_0$ : There is no correlation between reliance on social networking sites and attitudinal change for tour planning.

**Tab. 1: T-Test Analysis**

<b>One-Sample Statistics</b>				
	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Reliance on SNS for Tourism Information	188	1.50	.827	.185
Attitudinal Change for Tour Planning	188	1.65	.875	.196

## One-Sample Test

Test Value = 0

	t	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
					Lower	Upper
Reliance on SNS for Tourism Information	8.110	19	.000	1.500	1.11	1.89
Attitudinal Change for Tour Planning	8.432	19	.000	1.650	1.24	2.06

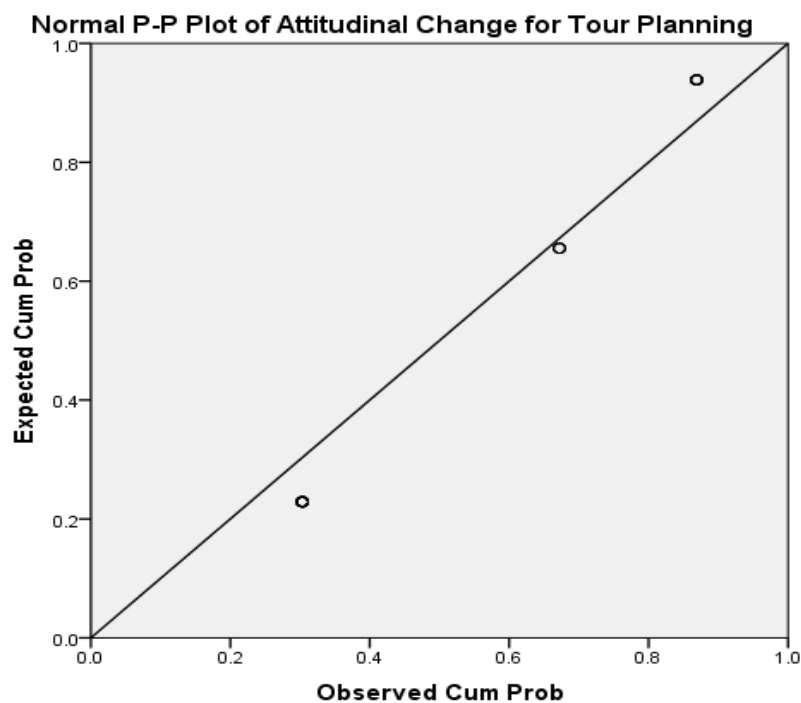


Table 1 carries the values of t-test comparing the means of both variables, i.e. Reliance on SNS for tourism information and Attitudinal Change for Tour Planning. There was a significant correlation in the mean scores that further indicates a strong correlation in both the Lower and Upper limits.  $H_0$  was rejected with 95% confidence level. Perception of the audiences was analyzed regarding the attitudinal change.

### Conclusion and Recommendations

The data revealed that social networking sites are the major source of information on tourism in Pakistan and the majority of the social media users deem it necessary to browse it over Facebook and Youtube whenever planning their recreations. They find it more economic and convenient to visit different regions of KP as compared to other regions of Pakistan. Potential of social media is to some extent utilized by the tour operators with the help of advertisements and

promotional strategies such as vlogs and documentaries etc. but the government initiatives are highly desirable. There is still a phenomenal number of respondents who have certain fears or concerns while planning a trip to the KP region that needs immediate attention by the stakeholders. Social media users seem more inspired by their friends visiting tourist places in KP and peer groups can be instigated through social media campaign. Better facilitation, law and order and infrastructure are the key to success of this potential industry.

### References

- Dergiades, T., Mavragani, E., & Pan, B. (2018). Google Trends and tourists' arrivals: Emerging biases and proposed corrections. *Tourism Management*(66), 108-120.
- Hussain, K. (2020). Social Media Impact on Tourism in Pakistan. *Bulletin of Business and Economics*, 74-84.
- Hussain, K. (2021). Social Media Impact on Tourism in Pakistan. *Bulletin of Business and Economics*, 74-84.
- Khan, J., Ali, A., Zada, M., Saeed, I., & Zada, S. (2022). Pakistan's Tourism Industry: Full of potential, but still lagging behind. *Research Square*, 1-11.
- Malik, A. J., Naseeb, M., Dogar, A. A., Shah, I., & Ali, S. W. (2020). The Role of Social Media in Destination Marketing: A Case Study of Galiyat Region in Pakistan. *International Journal on Emerging Technologies*, XI(5), 700-704.
- Nusair, K. K., Bilgihan, A., & Okumus, F. (2013). The role of online social network travel websites in creating social interaction for Gen Y travelers. *International Journal of Tourism Research*, XV(5), 458-472.
- Rodríguez-Díaz, M., Rodríguez-Díaz, R., & Espino-Rodríguez, T. F. (2018). Analysis of the online reputation based on customer ratings of lodgings in tourism destinations. *Administrative Sciences*, VIII(3), 51.
- Serra Cantallops, A., & Salvi, F. (2014). New Consumer Behavior: A Review of Research on eWOM and Hotels. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*(36), 41-51.
- Sussman, S. W., & Siegal, W. S. (n.d.). Information Influence in Organizations: An Integrated Approach to Knowledge Adoption. *Information Systems Research*, 47-56.
- Yoo, K. H., Lee, Y., Gretzel, U., & Fesenmaier, D. R. (2009). Trust in travel-related consumer generated media. *Information and Communication Technologies in Tourism*, 49-59.