

Role of Social Media in Tourism Sector with Special Reference to Karnataka

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Tourism is a complex socio-economic and cultural phenomenon contributing in a remarkable manner to economy of a country. For long time marketing in Tourism was mainly through advertising, publication of Travel Guides, Brochures, Travel magazines etc. Gradually the Electronic media was used to optimize the impact of Tourism business over the revenue of the Country. In the past decade the role of Social Media platforms in enhancing the economic activity in Tourism sector has been remarkable. Social Media is a group of Internet based application that build on the ideological and technological foundation of web 2.0 and that allow creation and exchange of user generated content. To name a few - Facebook, You Tube, Twitter, Pinterest, Instagram, Trip Advisor, LinkedIn, Google+ etc [1].

Karnataka ranks Fourth in Tourism in India. The draft of the Karnataka Tourism policy 2015-20 clearly indicates the conscious concerted efforts of the State Government in enhancing the presence of Tourism Sector in Social Media platforms. The impact of digital marketing on attracting both Domestic and Foreign tourists not only for Heritage sites, Religious destinations, Cultural festivals, Wildlife Sanctuaries, Places of Adventure, Sculptural Exhibitions and marketing Regional Crafts has been phenomenal. Even the travel agencies and Hotel/Resort proprietors have a dedicated team to monitor social comments on a daily basis. The KSTDC has chosen Panga, a Bengaluru-based digital agency as its online partner.

Social Media is used to promote a tourist destination or products. The main objective of the research paper is:

- To study the growing awareness of Social media approach in the Tourism Sector with special reference to Karnataka
- To examine the impact of Social Media platforms on consumer behaviour
- Strategies for enhancing the business of travel and Tourism related sectors.
- Effective use of Social media for promotion of Tourism

In 2004 the term “Social Media” was used after LinkedIn created its Social networking application. In recent times there are a variety of Social media platforms such as Facebook, Amazon.com, and branded Web destinations ebay.com and companies such as IBM and Dell [2]. Hotels are using Social Media having a dedicated team to monitor social comments on a daily basis. It has helped the hospitality sector to provide better services to attract the consumers [3].

Karnataka ranks Fourth in India in Tourism. Coorg has won an award for being a favourite Tourist destination. Mysore is the most popular destination that exhibits

influence of Raj era. The theme of Karnataka Tourism has been “One State Many Worlds” [4]. Karnataka is one among the top ten valuable Tourist destinations in the world. It is interesting to note that Karnataka ranks Fourth in Tourism in India. Coorg won an award for being favourite Tourist destination. The Hampi Utsav attracted over 5.35 lakh tourists (including foreigners) 2016-17. Karnataka is also known for National parks, Wildlife Sanctuaries, Beaches. The Theme of Karnataka Tourism is “One State Many Worlds.”

The Draft of the Karnataka Tourism Policy 2015-20 clearly stated the incentives available for Electronic media:

- Blogs & Websites
- Audio Guides
- Documentaries.

The Department of Telecommunications has defined the parameters for the applicant to be eligible for subsidy as follows:

- The content of Electronic Media should be to promote and generate awareness about Tourism in Karnataka.
- Material should be pertaining exclusively to Karnataka or to the destinations that are in Karnataka
- The information produced in the Social Media should be accurate and verified.
- Audio guides should be made available in English, Kannada and Hindi

The Karnataka State Tourism Development Corporation (KSTDC) has selected social Panga, a Bengaluru- based digital agency as its digital marketing partner [5].

Social media enhances the product/ service awareness, Improves customer relation and built more business connections. Social media marketing has a competitive edge on traditional methods of advertising marketing. It is mainly Cost effective and helps capture large number of tourists. Further Social media marketing triggers unprecedented effect on business.

It is interesting to note that the KSTDC used the Social Media for Dasara Campaign. During Dasara the KSTDC along with Alliance Air started budget flights from Bengaluru to Mysore costing starting from INR 999. And it was promoted through digital marketing. The major insights were;

- Dasara is a renowned festival attracting both Domestic and Foreign visitors every year.
- Communication is to be sent out within a short period of just 2 weeks before and during the festival.

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- Stakes are high as there is risk of flights not getting booked and could have incurred heavy loss.

The optimized paid promotion through Social media defined the content strategy that included visuals, Gifts and animated mini videos. It was clear that it resulted in reaching out to 14000 people and nearly 15000 interacted by way of shares and comments. So under the Dasara Campaign it was decided to extend Akash Ambari flights beyond the preciously decided Dasara festival timeline as a regular flight schedule [6].

The KSTDC has enhanced its Social Media presence realising the significant role of Digital marketing to enhance the revenue of the State. Kumar Pushkar, Managing Director, KSTDC said the various contests were being conducted via Social Media. Promotional events were organized in response to complaints from Tour operators about the lack of adequate branding of Tourist spots in the State of Karnataka. Hence from January to March 2019 compared to 35 % in 2018 the occupancy rose to 45% and this has been attributed to Social Media presence of KSTDC in Facebook Twitter and Youtube [7].

The following is the Statistical data related to Domestic and Foreign visitors to Karnataka [8]:

	Domestic visitors	Foreign Visitors
2013	94 million	0.63 million
2014	118.3 million	0.56 million
2015	119.9 million	0.64 million
2016	129.7 million	0.46 million
2017	180 million	0.5 million

Karnataka contributes 14.8% towards Karnataka’s GDP and supports 16 million jobs. Karnataka’s International Travel Expo sponsored by Karnataka Tourism Department and Karnataka Tourism Society has 400 registered buyers and Sellers from 29 countries [9].

The Government of Karnataka felt the need for Social Media Marketing of Karnataka Tourism due to the Economic impact of Tourism Sector. The following are the Tourism Related Industries-

1. Accommodation Services (Hotels, Private Guest House and Resorts)
2. Food and Beverage Serving Services at Railway stations and Bus stands
3. Passenger Transport Services
4. Travel Agencies and Tour Operators
5. Recreational and Entertainment services

The Karnataka Tourism Department has left no stone unturned to showcase Heritage Tourism, Spiritual Tourism, Beach Tourism, Nature Tourism, Wildlife Tourism Adventure Tourism and also cultural extravaganza and cuisine of Karnataka in Social media platforms. The role of Social Media in attracting tourists to

Karnataka becomes all the more relevant as it involves tremendous impact on travel related Consumer Goods such as Suitcases, hand bags, Gems and Jewellery and handicrafts [10]. It is rather interesting to note that the Karnataka Tourism Department has showcased the local handicrafts of Karnataka such as Channapatna Toys and Bidariware in Social media platforms to enhance the sale of regional handicrafts as the tourists visiting Karnataka would love to purchase Souvenirs of the destinations that they visit. It indeed has a great impact on the Commerce of the State. Tourists who visit Karnataka are no doubt influenced by the Social media comments on the services of various travel agencies as well as Hotels/ Resorts. They have easy access to examine special holiday Videos posted by Hotels on social media [11].

Karnataka is also the hub of Health, Medical and Wellness Tourism with a mix of traditional systems like Ayurveda, yoga and modern medical expertise. Invariably the Social media has impacted the Medical Tourism in Karnataka. One of the pioneers of Medical Tourism is Apollo hospitals and its “Platinum Win” focuses exclusively on International patients. Nearly 15% -20% of the patients treated at the Narayana Hrudayalaya are medical tourists. The Fortis hospital receives 40-50 medical tourists per month.

The Social Media platforms have indeed played a significant role in influencing the consumer behaviour and eventually the commercial impact on Tourism. For instance Kiran Mazumdar Shaw slammed the “Primitive Service at Kabini Lodge” and the Twitterati evoked mixed response to it [12]. The Comment of Kiran Mazumdar Shaw “My Foreign Guests visited Jungle Lodges at Kabini n I understand the rooms were primitive n food was awful. The only redeeming aspect was the jungle. Why is @Karnataka tourism incapable of running a decent operation when they charge \$260 per person per day” prompted people from different walks of life who have used the Government run facility to share their experiences while some of the criticized the JLR for being expensive and offering poor services, some others showered praises while some others blamed the Guests for expecting more from a nature resort.

It is interesting to note that most of the mobile and computer users in the internet era are highly influenced by social media and it has a tremendous impact on their lifestyle opinions, evaluations and decision making about purchase and usage pattern of products and services [13]. Hence the Karnataka Tourism Department and service providers in Tourism sector have identified the following factors-

- The Karnataka State Tourism Department and Travel agencies must update relevant information using different social media sites with frequent intervals.
- The Service providers in Tourism Sector need to learn how to react to negative comments that may spoil the trust of the new visitors.
- Tourism Service Providers need to enhance the image clarity in their advertisements to reach out to large number of tourists.

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