

# A Conceptual Framework: The Impact of Social Media Marketing Activities on Destination Image and Intention to Visit

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## Abstract

With the great competition especially during the post-COVID-19, attracting the tourists to visit or re-visit the destination has become the cornerstone for Destination Management Organization (DMO). Marketing activities on social media have been identified as capable of enhancing the positive image of a tourist destination and, simultaneously, increasing the intention to travel of travelers. However, there is still a need for further exploration of social media marketing activities in the context of tourism, as insufficient understanding and knowledge of integrating social media marketing strategies may negatively impact the tourism industry. To address this issue, this study will adopt the Stimulus – Organism – Response (SOR) model. It specifically examines the impact of social media marketing activities (SMMA) on destination image and tourists' intention to visit, using Tourism Selangor's social media platforms as a case study. This study will employ a non-probability technique sampling and the target population for the study will be all Malaysians who are 18 years old and above who have experienced browsing Tourism Selangor's social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Youtube, LinkedIn, and TikTok for tourism-related - purposes. To test it's the study hypothesis this study will employ SmartPLS (version 3.1.1). The findings will provide insightful implications theoretically and practically in the tourism industry realm.

## Keywords:

Social Media Marketing, Destination Image, Intention To Visit, Destination Management Organization, Stimulus – Organism – Response

## 1 Introduction

Tourism serves as a significant catalyst for global economic growth, yielding substantial revenue and employment opportunities, and fostering cultural exchange (Rasul et al., 2021). Nevertheless, the unexpected global pandemic in 2020 caused numerous problems for the tourism industry, leading to a significant decrease in international travel demand due to closures and travel restrictions (UNWTO, 2022). One of the paramount challenges post-pandemic is to elicit tourists' interest in visiting destinations. Selangor, one of the districts in Malaysia severely affected by the pandemic, is responding by proactively embracing digitalization efforts (UNWTO, 2021). Recognizing the need to adapt to the "new normal" trends precipitated by the pandemic, the organization is intensifying its focus on digitalizing tourism-related activities. This strategic shift towards digital platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and Twitter reflects a broader effort to navigate the challenges posed by the pandemic and ensure resilience in the face of ongoing uncertainties. Social media marketing has emerged as a pivotal strategy for rejuvenating the tourism industry by enriching the tourist experience and influencing tourist behavior (Halabi et al., 2022; Siegel et al., 2023; Ye et al., 2023). Furthermore, the significance of social media marketing has intensified in the wake of the pandemic (Mason, 2020). Therefore, by leveraging digital technologies, Tourism Selangor aims to enhance its ability to engage with tourists, promote destinations, and facilitate travel experiences in a post-pandemic world, ultimately seeking to revitalize the tourism sector and mitigate the adverse effects of the crisis. Additionally, cultivating a positive image of tourist destinations has become particularly crucial, especially in the aftermath of the pandemic, to attract more tourists. Consequently, social media marketing activities have been identified as effective tools for enhancing the image of tourist destinations and, in turn, impacting tourists' intentions to visit (Barber & Barber, 2022).

Besides, social media marketing activities, destination image, and traveler behavioral intentions are among the most important factors in the tourism industry. The relationship between these factors is dynamic and mutually reinforcing. Effective social media marketing activities can positively shape a destination's image, influencing potential travelers to form a favorable intention to visit. This intention, in turn, can lead to actual visits, benefiting the destination's revenue and overall economic development (Morais & Lin, 2010; Aytas et al., 2021; Chi & Phuong, 2022). Consequently, understanding and effectively managing these factors are imperative for tourism stakeholders seeking to thrive in a competitive and constantly changing industry.

Despite the fact more studies have been done on social media marketing activities in various study settings, there remains a need for further exploration of this concept, particularly in the context of tourism (Ibrahim et al., 2021; Barber & Barber 2022). Nonetheless, the deficiency in knowledge and comprehension regarding the seamless integration of social media marketing strategies could potentially lead to a significant decline in the performance of the tourism industry, as underscored by Canovi and Pucciarelli in their 2019 study. Apart from that, there is a limited number of publications

on the Stimulus-Organism-Response (SOR) framework in tourism and hospitality journals between 2010 and 2021 (Asyraff et al., 2023). This suggests a lack of representation among scholars and researchers in the field of tourism. Therefore, to bridge this gap, this paper proposes a conceptual framework to understand the relationship between social media marketing with tourist intention to visit via destination image as a mediator variable.

Owing to this study's significance, theoretically, this study can contribute to the body of knowledge by addressing the lack of a comprehensive understanding of social media marketing activities in tourism, particularly in the Malaysian context. Besides, this study can expand the understanding of the stimulus organism response (SOR) model and its interrelationships for further research and practical applications in the field of tourism and marketing study. From a practical perspective, this study holds the potential to significantly enrich policymaking by facilitating more informed decision-making in the development of desirable and highly effective marketing strategies tailored to specific destinations. Furthermore, the outcomes of this research stand as a valuable resource, offering guidance and reference for stakeholders in the tourism sector seeking to craft and implement effective marketing strategies.

Above all, the present paper is organized into four sections. The next section elaborates on the three hypotheses statements, such as Social media marketing activities (entertainment, trendiness, interaction, customization, e-WOM, and advertisement) significantly influence destination image; secondly, the destination image influences the intention to visit; and thirdly, the destination image mediates the relationship between social media marketing activities and the intention to visit, along with the proposed framework and hypotheses development. The methodology will be discussed in section three. Finally, this paper ends with a conclusion.

## **2 Literature Review**

### **2.1 Social Media Marketing Activities (SMMA) and Destination Image**

Social media marketing in tourism has been known as an influential tool in boosting tourism development. The study of social media marketing activities has been examined in numerous such as hotels (Baber & Baber, 2022), restaurants (Anas et al., 2023; Bushara et al., 2023), airlines (Moslehpour et al., 2021), and luxury brands (Fetais et al., 2023). The pivotal marketing activities that contributed to this development included entertainment, interaction, trendiness, customization, e-WOM, and advertisement. These six activities or dimensions have been investigated by many previous researchers in the realm of social media marketing (Kim & Ko, 2012; Zhu & Chen, 2015; Godey et al., 2016; Bilgin, 2018; Moslehpour et al., 2021; Shuyi et al., 2022; Bilgin & Kethuda, 2022).

Social media plays a significant role in forming impressions about tourism destinations and creating a positive image from the stakeholders' perspective (De las Heras-Pedrosa et al., 2020; Farhangi et al., 2021). By utilizing social media, destination marketing organizations (DMOs) can effectively engage with consumers, influencing the

destination image positively. This is achieved through the creation of entertaining content that highlights the destination's unique features (De las Heras-Pedrosa et al., 2020; Farhangi et al., 2021).

Other than that, DMOs can provide accurate and up-to-date information about the destination, and demonstrate unique experiences available to tourists (Sultan et al., 2021). This approach contributes to enhancing the destination image. A study conducted by Kim et al. (2017) which explored the impact of content and non-content cues of tourism information quality on users' perception of the destination image in social media has found that social media are positively linked with different types of destination image. The relationship between destination image and social media also stimulates user-driven innovations (UDI) in tourism (Stepaniuk, 2015). These innovations further contribute to enhancing the destination image by offering tourists unique and innovative experiences. Thus, the following hypotheses are based on the previous arguments:

*H1: Social media marketing activities (entertainment, trendiness, interaction, customization, e- WOM, and advertisement) significantly influence destination image*

## **2.2 Destination Image and Intention to Visit**

The image of a destination holds a significant influence in attracting tourists, as individuals' perceptions shape it and directly impacts their tourism-related behaviors and choices (Abdellatif et al., 2014; Pan et al., 2021). This destination image acts as a unique characteristic that sets a destination apart from others, contributing to the overall development of tourism and playing a pivotal role in tourists' decision-making process and subsequent behaviors during their visit (Kanwel et al., 2019). Empirical studies consistently demonstrate the significant impact of destination image on tourists' behavioral intentions (Viana et al., 2021). Previous literature provides further support for the notion that the online image of a destination has a positive impact on consumer behavior, leading to an increased intention to visit, revisit, or recommend the destination (Huertes & Marine, 2015; Molinillo et al., 2018; Jimmerez et al., 2020). Precisely on the pre-visitation context, prospective tourists who do not have any visitation experience to Eliot, Israel, have shown a positive projected overall destination image that influences their future intention as compared to tourists who have previously visited the location (Papadimitriou et al., 2018).

Despite the numerous studies conducted on the concept of destination image spanning over five decades, the tourism literature has largely overlooked the exploration of destination image as a mediating variable, as indicated by Liang and Xue (2021). A study by Barber and Barber (2022) has demonstrated that destination image plays a significant role in mediating the relationship between social media marketing activities and the intention to visit. These findings align with previous studies that emphasize the significant role of destination image in influencing tourists' intention to visit (Chen & Kerstetter, 1999; Chen & Tsai, 2007; Tasci & Gartner, 2007; Aldao &

Mihalic, 2020). Researchers in the field of tourism and hospitality have increasingly shown interest in the mediating function of the organism within the extended SOR model by Mehrabian and Russell. Most of the studies that evaluated organisms as the moderating variable adapted emotion components (Liu et al., 2021; Su & Swanson, 2017; Zhang & Xu, 2019) and perceived enjoyment (Hew et al., 2018; So et al., 2020). The role of the destination image as the organism and mediating variable within the integrated framework is still available for further investigation. Hence, based on the argument, this study proposed the following hypothesis:

*H2: Destination image significantly influences the intention to visit*

*H3: Destination Image mediates the relationship between social media marketing activities and the intention to visit.*

### **2.3 Intention to Visit**

In the tourism setting, the stronger one's intention to visit a destination, the more likely one is to visit the place (Liu et al., 2016). The decision to travel to a specific destination is shaped by a range of elements, encompassing marketing activities, engagement with social media, personal preferences, expectations, travel motivation, destination image, and electronic word of mouth (Chaulagain et al., 2019; Barreto et al., 2020; Chi & Phuong, 2022; Ghaffar et al., 2022). Aytas et al. (2021) found that industry players can predict future demand by looking into several factors that affect potential visitors' decision-making or their intention to visit a destination. In other research by Morais and Lin (2010), it is imperative for destination marketing organizations (DMOs) to maintain a balance of visitation from first-timer and repeat visitors as can enhance the destination's revenue. This indicates that to succeed, a destination must have a strong and effective marketing strategy in order to boost potential visitors' intention to visit a destination.

### **2.4 Stimulus Organism Responses (SOR)**

The SOR model functions as the foundational theory, suggesting that specific attributes of an environment or stimuli trigger consumers' inner responses, influencing their engagement in particular behaviors (Jacoby, 2002; Mehrabian and Russell, 1974). From the tourism and hospitality context, the application of extended SOR is applied to assess people's perception and behaviour of specific tourist destinations or countries. The SOR model which was originally grounded in environmental psychology has found application among researchers to investigate consumer behavior in both physical settings, such as restaurants, hotels, museums, and transportation, as well as in the online realm, focusing on aspects like website quality and information, as highlighted by Kang and Namkung (2019). Consequently, this study suggests that perceived social media marketing activities serve as stimuli that incite tourists to encounter a destination image on social media. In this context, the destination image represents the organism, encompassing cognitive and emotional states resulting from exposure to social media marketing activities, while the intention to visit constitutes the response. In this context, the response pertains to behavioral intentions, such as the intent to visit (Barber &

Barber, 2022). In marketing studies, the SOR model has been widely researched to understand how people respond to certain stimuli and organisms (Koey et al.,2020; Aljuhmani et al., 2022; Barber and Barber,2022; Shuyi et al.,2022; Ibrahim and Aljarah, 2023). Based on this description, the research utilizes the SOR model as the theoretical foundation for constructing the research model illustrated in Figure 1.

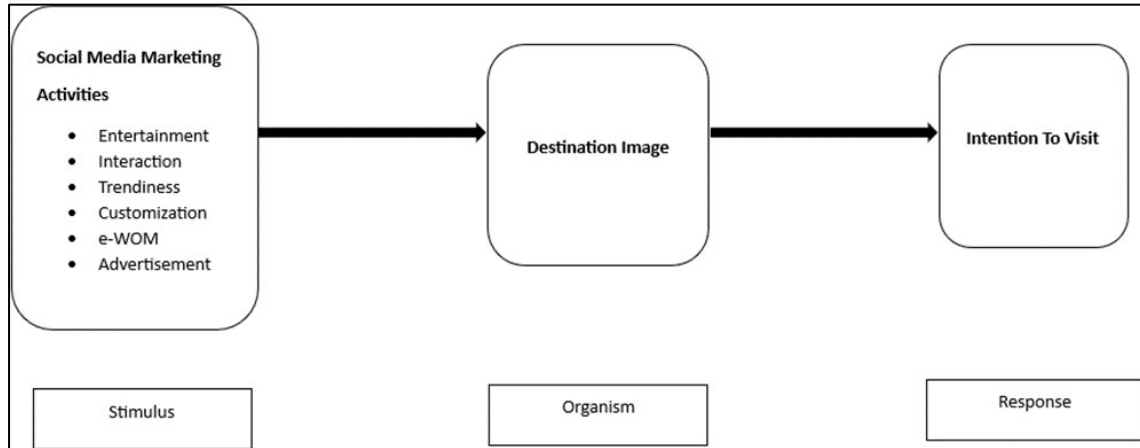


Figure 1: Proposed conceptual framework

### 3 Methodology

In this study, a quantitative approach will be employed, utilizing a non-probability purposive sampling technique. The determination of an adequate sample size will be carried out using G\*power analysis (Faul et al., 2009). The target population for this research comprises all Malaysians aged 18 and above who have engaged with Tourism Selangor’s social media platforms, including Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, YouTube, LinkedIn, and TikTok, for tourism-related purposes. This population is selected for several reasons: Firstly, Tourism Selangor has consistently stood out in Malaysia's tourism sector for three consecutive years, notably in terms of domestic tourist arrivals compared to other states. Secondly, social media platforms like Facebook rank among the most popular channels for travel-related searches in Malaysia (Hua et al., 2017). An online survey will be conducted using Google Forms to distribute the questionnaire to respondents via WhatsApp.

The instrument that will be used for data collection was adapted from the constructs previously developed by scholars. Social media marketing activities with 31 items adapted from Bilgin (2018), Bilgin and Kethuda (2022), Aji et al. (2022), and Shuyi et al. (2022), destination image with 13 items adapted from Stylos et al. (2016), Stylidis et al. (2017), and Masa’deh et al. (2021). Lastly, the intention to visit with four items adapted from Alsheikh et al. (2021) and Yadav et al. (2022).

The data analysis comprises two stages for a thorough examination. Firstly, a pilot study involving a minimum of 30 respondents will be conducted to refine methodologies and ensure data accuracy. Subsequently, the actual sample of respondents will undergo analysis utilizing IBM SPSS (Version 27) for descriptive analysis. In the second stage,

SmartPLS (Version 3.1.1) will be utilized to scrutinize the hypothesis paths and relationships between variables. Additionally, bootstrapping, a robust statistical technique, will be employed to investigate whether destination image serves as a mediator between social media marketing activities and the intention to visit. This method is deemed appropriate for assessing indirect effects, as recommended by Hair et al. (2017).

### **3.1 Theoretical and Practical Contributions**

The theoretical contributions of this study encompass several aspects. The first contribution is confirming dimensions of social media marketing, including entertainment, interaction, trendiness, customization, eWOM, and advertisement, and their significance in this study context. It also validates destination image formation, considering cognitive and affective aspects of tourism. Consequently, the variables that are proposed in this research model are considered as a significant contribution to the existing literature.

Secondly, this study provides valuable insights into the SOR model, social media marketing, and destination image. It expands understanding and facilitates further research in tourism and marketing, with a focus on DMOs. The primary objective is to bridge the SOR model's theoretical gap and confirm the destination image as a mediating variable within the model.

Moreover, this study also will help practitioners enhance decision-making for policymakers, such as Tourism Selangor, Selangor's Tourism and Natural Environment Executive Councillor Office, and the Ministry of Tourism, Arts, and Culture (MOTAC). It provides crucial insights into the effectiveness of social media marketing for aligning strategies with the First Selangor Plan (RS-1), supporting Selangor's transformation goals.

Additionally, it aids tourism stakeholders like travel agencies, tour operators, hotels, and tour guides in crafting strategic social media marketing plans. These plans promote state tourism via platforms like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, YouTube, and TikTok, contributing significantly to marketing success and wider audience reach for Tourism Selangor and stakeholders.

## **4 Conclusion**

The paper introduces a study that investigates the influence of various social media marketing activities – including entertainment, interaction, trendiness, customization, e-WOM, and advertisement – in order to propose effective strategies for tourism stakeholders, especially Destination Marketing Organizations (DMOs), in Malaysia. The expanding body of research underscores the potential impact of social media marketing activities on tourists' future behaviors. In this context, tourists' intentions to visit may be influenced by a multitude of

factors, including the portrayal of the destination image on social media. Consequently, this study aims to shed light on how these dimensions interrelate, offering valuable insights for tourism stakeholders.

## 5 About the author

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