

The Impact of Social Media Marketing To Tourism Post-COVID19 In Malaysia

Khairun Nisa Mustaffa Halabi¹, Masri Abdul Lasi², Mustaffa Halabi Azahari³, Saw Eu Gene⁴

^{1,2}*City Graduate School, City University, Malaysia,*

^{3,4}*Faculty of Creative Industries, City University, Malaysia.*

Abstract

Global pandemic COVID-19 has impacted tourism in Malaysia. The image and perception towards tourism has changed consumer's perception towards the safety and risk of traveling. In response, all borders are closed to visitors and tourists, therefore the government has an initiative to encourage the public to travel in the country to encounter the economic crisis. The purpose of this paper is to investigate the impact of social media marketing to consumer behaviour of post COVID-19 towards the intention to travel. The emergence of social media as a medium communication from the travel agencies, hoteliers to consumers has influenced the perception and travel intention. This paper employed 35 students and the results showed respondents' perspectives on integrating information and enhancing the possibility of travel intention. The DEMATEL results indicated that awareness about social causes, information satisfaction and entertaining content and compared product alternatives as the most important predictors of social media. The results revealed that experience moderated the relationship between social media determinants and travel intention. This paper also concludes that social media marketing has an impact on consumer behaviour and decision willingly to travel.

Keywords— post COVID-19, travel intention, social media for tourism, social media marketing, decision-making

Introduction

The pandemic COVID-19 has impacted Malaysia's economic growth. World Bank Malaysia Economic Monitor stated that the percent growth of Malaysia's economy is susceptible due to COVID-19 (Foong & Subramaniam, 2021). The tourism industry in Malaysia is one of the important sectors that has massively impacted from the COVID-19 outbreak, particularly in hotel businesses and the airlines. The seriousness of the COVID-19 cases has led Malaysia to have total lockdown and brought many hotels, resorts, motels, chalets businesses shut down and suffered. The global

recession occurred from the impact of multiple lockdowns and massively affected small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). Small and big hotel businesses need to extend their knowledge to overcome this crisis and understand how to enhance their marketing strategies. The use of social media as a tool of innovation for people due to availability of information concerning their travel intention.

Digital technologies such as social media are a significant medium to encourage people to travel and attract the greatest promotions. Social media is a powerful tool to deliver messages, information as well as communication. Social media also enhances better consumer relations

and reaches consumers easily by sharing the information of price promotions and other benefits of staying at their hotels. They have significantly changed the practice of marketing communication for many companies, including those in the tourism and hospitality industry, for instance providing solid knowledge to travellers about destinations and tourism products (Liu et al., 2020).

Previous research discussed the impact and roles of social media in tourism has focused on particular aspects of the issue after pandemic COVID-19 such as perceived discrimination (Yang & Wong, 2020), sustainable tourism (Stuchlíková & Botlíková, 2021), local travel behaviour (Zhang et al., 2021), travel patterns (Abdullah et al., 2020), and perceived travel risk (Abraham et al., 2020). However, the significance of social media towards consumer's travel intention and decision-making in Malaysia has been limited. The characteristics of social media marketing are able to focus on the consumer determination of finding their needs and choices. Through this study, we describe the impact of social media marketing on consumer travel intentions so that future researchers can further extend other intensifying mechanisms of social media adoption for other countries or cultural backgrounds.

Literature Review

- **Social media and travel intention**

Social media can be defined as a group of Internet-based applications based on the ideological and technological Web 2.0 foundations that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content (Zolkepli & Kamarulzaman, 2015). Social media provides a medium to enhance business sales and low-cost effective strategy to connect with a large number of consumers (Mount & Garcia Martinez, 2014). The functions of social media provide identity, conversations, sharing, presence, relationships,

reputations, and groups that enable users to acknowledge and examine a specific appearance of social media experience (Kietzmann et al., 2011). The communication strategies such as the level of brand relationship and the level of category involvement can be utilised by social media. Direct involvement with consumers enhances emotional connections between consumers and businesses that can lead to developing loyalty, satisfaction, and brand perceptions. Moreover, social media can enhance the brand awareness and perception of visual experience and material that can attract their travel intention. Hotel businesses are able to share the consumer's feedback and real-life experiences that can be used as a strategy to provide information to potential consumers and attract the information.

Additionally, visually appealing images and videos can have a positive impact on the consumer's perception as well as to hotel businesses. Social media campaigns, if they are well integrated, provide a synergistic form of interaction and diffusion to large numbers of consumers and have the potential to change the organisation's message from being perceived as a commercial source of information to being perceived as a social change and known as social media transformation process (Kilgour et al., 2015).

Travel intention is the interest of consumers to travel. This intention conveys to attitude and preference to travel during post COVID-19. Consumer 'new normal society' becomes a critical issue for businesses. The nature of tourism that requires travelling and its evolution and growth paradigms are a significant contributor to such circumstances and the current socio-economic system accelerating the spread and impact of this contagious and infectious virus (Sigala, 2020). It is significant for businesses to use social media to influence consumer's decision-making and their intention on travel. The main objective of this paper is to

provide a holistic and integrated picture of the roles that social media play in tourists' choices after post COVID-19 in the 'new normal society'.

- **The Role of social media In Decision-Making**

Decision-making process involves a series of phases such as problem recognition, generation of goals and objectives, alternative object formulation, information search, evaluation of other alternatives, final conclusion and choice among alternatives, action upon the decision and provision of feedback for future decision (Liu et al., 2020). The first impression is significant towards consumer's perception and judgements of the overall image of the product or brand (Halabi & Hands, 2018). In the tourism services, the process of selecting decisions is crucial where consumers consider many aspects such as destination selections, the amount of people traveling, the date of travel, the planned destination or location of attractions and accommodation. Consumers will seek guidance by searching the information, reviews, comments, or feedbacks through social media to help their decision-making process. The number of COVID-19 cases and percentage of population fully vaccinated has urged the public to aim for holiday travel. Businesses started to campaign to lure out the travel intention in order to inspire and motivate the public.

The significant phase is searching for the information. This phase is crucial for businesses to have extended information about their products to influence consumer's intention and judgement. Social media is seen as online advertisement or electronic word-of-mouth where it includes all the information where consumers exchange information, feedback, reviews that can give positive impression and influence decision-making process. Electronic word-of-mouth offers positive or negative testimonials made by potential, actual or former

consumers about a product or company through the internet (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004).

Businesses use the social media channels as their communication medium for marketing to motivate their interests to travel based on the testimonials or photos shared on the internet. Interesting photos and videos using unique hashtags that represent the brand or products also enhance product or brand awareness that alleviated the influence of the process of decision-making. For instance, businesses shared many beautiful photos of the travel destinations with overwhelming colours and views to promote tourism locations and activities on social media. The elements of photos such as colours and the compositions of image can influence consumer's decision making about the travel destination (Lynn et al., 2013). This paper examines the factors of how social media are actually used by consumers in their decision-making and intention to travel using travel components such as destination, transportation, accommodation and leisure activities.

- **The Role of Social Media Marketing in Product Evaluation**

Social media communication between businesses and users becomes vital for brand engagement and awareness. To date, the consumer-brand interaction generates deeper connections compared to traditional communication medium. Small and medium sized enterprises (SME) create inventive ideas to shape the perceptions of consumers as well as attract them to purchase the products or services. The spread of words from one user to another establish common version of intentional viral marketing that generate their driven towards the brand when exchanging information occur and influence consumers' choice and shape their expectations (Bruyn & Lilien, 2008). The experiences and opinions about the products or services shared on social media are available to

consumer who are seeking information to help making a purchasing decision. The mechanism of spread of words through social media enhance the brand awareness level and develop the interest level and influence the decision-making process through cost-efficient and benefits communication. For example, the information of post-purchase communication about products or services based on consumers' affective responses, satisfaction and equity perceptions enable to enhance the focus of companies' marketing strategy on creating price discussion about a product or other offering (Mazzarol et al., 2007).

This paper evaluates the factors that influence travel intention based on their behaviour and responses towards social media. Three research questions have been raised: (1) how social media enhances consumer travel intention? (2) What are the general weaknesses, strengths, opportunities and challenges using social media in enhancing the tourism industry? and (3) How can social media assist the development of the tourism industry? In order to answer the research questions, firstly, we analyse the context of social media through consumer's responses towards social media advertisements found in Facebook, Instagram and Pinterest. Secondly, we discuss the role of social media in influencing consumer's travel intentions for the 'new normal society' and 'Standard Operating Procedure' (SOP). This paper introduces a hierarchy of content marketing based upon the type of relationship between the user and the organisation, as well as their level of product category involvement. Hence, we make the following hypotheses:

H1: Social media marketing has positive influence with consumer travel intention

H2: Social media marketing has positive influence with consumer information satisfaction

H3: Social media marketing has positive influence with consumer social needs

Research Methods

As part of their marketing strategy, social media sites such as Facebook, Google, Instagram, Pinterest, and others are the medium of social interaction. These social implications have a massive impact on the business sales and enhances the tendency of consumers to travel with certain brand hotels. The objective of this paper is to analyse what consumers are currently considering in the area of social media and how consumers can influence their travel intention through social media content in the marketing campaigns.

In order to identify best practices for social media marketing, both social media users and businesses were undertaken. First, surveys were undertaken with postgraduate students in private and public universities.

Data Collection and Instruments

In this study, library studies and field research have been used to collect data. Data was obtained from library studies such as library references, articles, books, and the World Wide Web (internet articles, and internal and external research) have been used to collect information on theoretical foundations field and research subject literature. Meanwhile, the researchers used an expert questionnaire to collect data.

A questionnaire is one of the common research instruments and a direct method for obtaining research data. A questionnaire is a set of questions, phrases, and items that the respondent provides the needed answer by considering them. This answer is the data needed by the researcher. An expert questionnaire was distributed to collect information. In this section, the respondent has a 5-point range (without effect with 0 and has a very high effect with number 4) to answer each of the questions

regarding the use of social media as a platform for hotel businesses to influence consumer travel intention and for interaction.

Table 1: Definition of comparison numbers in DEMATEL method

Effect rate	No effect	Low effect	Average effect	High effect	Very high effect
Quantitative effect	0	1	2	3	4

Inferential Analysis of Findings

- **Identify the Pattern of Causal Relationships Between Variables**

DEMATEL technique has been used to reflect the internal relations among the main criteria. So that professionals can give their opinions more dominant about the effects (direction and severity of effects) between factors. It should be noted that the matrix derived from the DEMATEL technique (internal communication matrix) shows both the causal and effect relationship between the factors and the variability and effectiveness of the variables.

- **Calculating the Direct Relationship Matrix (M)**

The $\times n$ matrix is firstly formed to identify the pattern of relationships between the n criteria. The effect of the element in each row is inscribed on the elements in the column in this matrix. A spectrum with a score of 0 to 4 is used to scoring. So that if there is no effect, then the number is zero and if the effect is very large, then 4 is used. Also, contrary to the Analytic Hierarchical Process (AHP) and the Analytic Network Process (ANP) techniques, there is no inverse condition. That is, if the effect of element A on B to be 3, the effect of element B on A will not be necessarily $1/3$ and may be any number between zero and 4. The inline of the main diameter means the effect of each element on itself is considered as zero. In the following, the simple average of opinions was used, and we form the direct relationship matrix M.

Table 2: Direct Relationship Matrices (M) Main Criteria

M	ASC	IS	PP	ECCA
Awareness about social cause	1	4	3	0
Information satisfaction	2	2	0	4
Product purchase	3	0	1	2
Entertaining content and compare product alternatives	0	2	4	3

Calculation of the normal direct-relationship matrix: $N = k * M$

First, the sum of all rows and columns is calculated. Inverse of the largest number of rows and columns forms k . Based on the results of Table 4-4, the largest number is 9, and all the table values are multiplied by the inverse of this number to normalize the matrix.

$$k = \frac{1}{\max \sum_{j=1}^n a_{ij}}$$

$$N = \frac{1}{\max \sum_{j=1}^n a_{ij}} * M$$

Table 3: Normalized matrix (n) main criteria

Awareness about social cause	ASC	IS	PP	ECCA
Information satisfaction	0.11	0.44	0.33	0.00
Product purchase	0.22	0.22	0.00	0.44
Entertaining content and compare product alternatives	0.33	0.00	0.11	0.22
Social media marketing	0.00	0.22	0.44	0.33

• **Calculation the Complete Relationship Matrix**

To compute the matrix of complete relationship, the first matrix (I) is formed. Then;

(I) Matrix is minus the normalized matrix and reverses the resulting matrix. Finally, the researcher multiplies the normal matrix in the inverse matrix: $T = N \times (I - N)^{-1}$

Table 4: complete relationship matrix (T) Main criteria

T	ASC	IS	PP	ECCA
Awareness about social cause	1.44	1.52	1.68	1.17
Information satisfaction	1.82	1.35	1.61	1.26
Product purchase	1.39	1.20	1.14	1.13
Entertaining content and compare product alternatives	1.93	1.82	1.75	1.20

According to the results of Table 4, casual diagram can be drawn based on it:

Table 5: The causal relationship pattern of the main model criteria

MC	D	R	D+R	D-R
Awareness about social cause	5.81	-0.77	12.38	-0.77
Information satisfaction	6.04	5.89	11.92	0.15
Product purchase	4.86	6.18	11.04	-1.32
Entertaining content and compare product alternatives	6.70	4.77	11.46	1.93

In Table 5, the sum of the elements of each row (D) indicates the extent of its effect on other system factors. Therefore, the perceived quality of brand is most effective. Brand awareness is in second place. Awareness about social causes is in third place. The Product purchase criterion is in the fourth place.

The sum of the column elements (R) for each factor indicates the extent of its effect on other factors of the system. Based on this, the brand association criterion is highly effective. Information satisfaction criterion is in the second place of impressionability.

The Entertaining Content and compare product alternatives criterion are in third place of impressionability. Brand loyalty criterion also has the least impressionability than other criteria. Horizontal vector (D + R) is the amount of impact and effect of the factor in the system. In other words, the greater the D + R value, the more interacting with other system factors. Based on this, the brand loyalty criterion has the most interaction with other criteria. The Information satisfaction criterion also has a high degree of interaction with other criteria. Entertaining Content and comparing product alternatives and Information satisfaction criteria are in the third and fourth places of interaction with other variables.

Vertical vector (D-R) shows the affectability strength of each factor. In general, if D-R is positive, the variable is considered a causal variable, and if it is negative, it is considered an effect. In this model, Entertaining Content and comparing product alternatives and brand awareness are causal variables, and Awareness about social cause and Product purchase are effect variables.

• **Displaying Network Relationships Map**

To determine the map of network relationships (NRM), the threshold value must be calculated. In this way, partial relationships can be discarded and draw significant network relationships. Only relationships whose values in the matrix T were larger than the threshold value displayed in NRM. To calculate the value of the threshold of relationships, it is sufficient to calculate the mean values of the matrix T. After the threshold is determined, all the values of the T-matrix, which is smaller than the threshold, are ignored, means, the causal relationships are not considered. In this study, the threshold value has been obtained 1.46. Therefore, the significant relationships pattern is as follows:

Figure 1: Descartes DEMATEL outputs coordinates for the main criteria

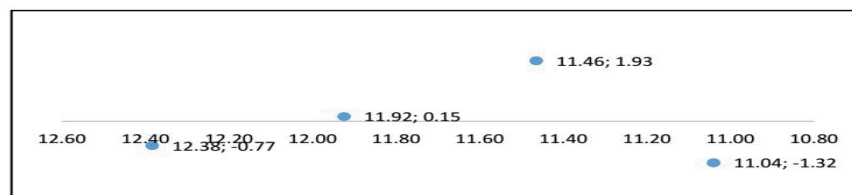


Table 6: Significance relationships model main criteria of the model

T	ASC	IS	PP	ECCA
Awareness about social cause	0	1	1	0
Information satisfaction	1	0	1	0
Product purchase	0	0	0	0
Entertaining content and compare product alternatives	1	1	1	0

Figure 2: The causal and effect relationships affecting Social Media Marketing



Discussion and Conclusions

This study analysed changes in the travel intention behaviour in Malaysia. The travel behaviour and style of choices are significantly changed during post COVID-19 compared to previous normal situation (pre COVID-19) due to SOP and restrictions by the government authorities or the concern of getting infection by others. The results are summarised below based on the online survey that was conducted to investigate the travel intention and behaviour in Malaysia due to COVID-19.

The results indicated that the purpose of travelling are the primary reasons after being locked down and restrictions for inter-district and interstate travel for months. Travelling is one of the activities that can describe the feeling of going back to normal. However, due to the fact that the international borders will be reopened soon, a strong desire to travel outside the country is also the main reason. The travel intention has changed from desire to both choice and essential needs. Furthermore, travelling during post COVID-19 can enhance the relationship between family and friends after being separated for months and missing significant life milestones such as anniversaries, birthdays, family days and many more.

Additionally, the findings of this study further explained that travel intention increases after the government eases travel restrictions for fully vaccinated. Promotions from hotel businesses and airlines in social media attract their intention easily for domestic and international travel. Respondents started to search information about destination hotels as well as looking to book their flight. The special promotions, good price and service offered to consumers can reach and attract them easily and faster. The images, music and messages in the promotions are rooted in the consumer's mind. The intentions are determined if the products or services offered satisfying the greatest match with their wants and needs.

Furthermore, cross-promotion in social media also influences travel intention and decision-making process. The results show that consumers attract two or more businesses together in a single promotion of a service or products. Respondents found this benefits them when there is collaboration of brands. Additionally, consumers tend to memorise cross-promotions in social media because of multiple benefits and services.

Due to the pandemic, businesses and marketers should focus and understand how social media are used to influence consumer's travel intention and their decision-making process as well as use it as a tool for marketing. The results show that the process of decision-making is based on testimonials or statements from other tourists. The photos can attract their intention; however, the feeling of satisfaction, trust and confidence can influence their travel intention the most through the testimonials shared by the tourists. The information of locations and the services provided in the social media create greater expectations and provide positive or negative judgement. Additionally, the process of decision-making is easier and faster through social media where the consumers search for the information and find alternatives. However, it does not influence their judgements on the confidence or trust by the service offered.

This study has a few limitations. Firstly, this study is based on the data collected through a random survey. The scatter and the variation due to the location cannot be generalised as a whole population of Malaysia. Secondly, the participants, who had access to the internet and who could understand and communicate in English, responded to this questionnaire. Additionally, it is likely that the reported behaviour might not be true representative of their actual travel behaviour, particularly after the pandemic. Certain demographic variables such as monthly household income and material status could not be included in the future.

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