

Social Media and Tourism Sports: The Golden Future of Pakistan

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Abstract

This study thoroughly examines the critical role that social media plays in bolstering sports tourist marketing efforts, in addition to discussing possible future approaches. Examining how social media may boost destination appeal, brand perception, and visitor engagement, with an emphasis on how the marketing of athletic events and promotional content on social media can strengthen the emotional bonds between travelers and places. This study uses qualitative research approach. Various themes have been studied related to the promotional content of sports tourism in Pakistan. Findings suggest that, despite number of challenges, Pakistan has considerable potential for sports tourism and social media can play a vital role in this regard.

Keywords: Social media, Tourism sports, Pakistan, Future prospects

Introduction

The importance of social media and the internet in international marketing tactics have grown with their quick development. Social media has become an essential link between locations and prospective travelers, especially in the sports tourism industry (Yan & Huan, 2024).

Through the power of social media platforms, sporting events, which are important events that draw both domestic and foreign tourists, can increase their influence and improve the allure and competitiveness of travel destinations (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010).

Through the power of social media platforms, sporting events, which are important events that draw both domestic and foreign tourists, can increase their influence and improve the allure and competitiveness of travel destinations. Nevertheless, there is still a dearth of comprehensive study on the effects of social media, even if its use in sports tourist marketing is expanding (Kim & Ko, 2012). Social media's marketing function is demonstrated not only by increasing destination engagement and brand visibility, but also by encouraging word-of-mouth advertising through user-generated content (UGC) (Munar & Jacobsen, 2014).

Additionally, social media platforms offer a very engaging setting that enables real-time communication between sports tourism sites and visitors, strengthening the sense of involvement and experience. Social media is now a vital instrument for marketing sports tourism (Hudson & Thal, 2013).

Social media has emerged as a key platform in today's sports tourism industry, linking travelers with travel destinations. It is essential for raising visitor engagement, destination visibility, and satisfaction levels (Yan & Huan, 2024).

Sports tourism destinations can communicate directly with prospective travelers on social media by posting details about events, travel-related activities, and content that appeals to travelers. This not only raises the destination's profile but also strengthens customer loyalty (Barišić & Bučar, 2022).

Additionally, user-generated information (like reviews and shares) enhances social media's impact and gives the location important word-of-mouth promotion. Social media provides a forum for experience engagement and information sharing, enabling travelers to learn more about the location and activities (Királ'ová & Pavlíček, 2015).

It is challenging to create this feeling of involvement and community with conventional marketing methods. Sports tourism destinations should use social media analytics tools to understand the preferences and behaviors of visitors in order to create more specialized and targeted marketing content that will appeal to various tourist groups (Javits, 2019). The significance of tailored content and targeted marketing strategies on social media is growing (Marine-Roig, Martin-Fuentes, & Daries-Ramon, 2017).

According to recent studies, visitors' interest in sporting events and travel-related activities is greatly increased by interaction and the usage of multimedia content on social media, including videos and live broadcasts (Femenia-Serra & Gretzel, 2020).

Social media, a powerful tool for spreading knowledge and feelings, gives advertisers a unique way to evoke the emotional response of prospective travelers by posting nostalgic content about historical sporting events and iconic sportsmen (Armutcu, Tan, Amponsah, Parida, & Ramkissoon, 2023).

In addition to rekindling travelers' need for cherished experiences, this nostalgia-driven marketing strategy strengthens their emotional connection to sports tourism destinations, increasing their desire to travel there. Nostalgia marketing techniques can significantly increase a destination's appeal, improve its brand perception, and eventually promote the expansion of sports tourism by leveraging the wide reach and interactive nature of social media platforms. Social media thus serves as a channel for promoting sentimental sentiments in sports tourist marketing as well as a means of fusing the past and present, evoking strong emotions and promoting involvement (Weingarten & Wei, 2023).

The importance of nostalgia in sports tourism has drawn more and more scholarly attention, demonstrating that nostalgia has a significant impact on consumer choice that goes beyond simple emotional experience. Customers are inspired to develop strong emotional bonds with sporting events or locations by nostalgia, which evokes memories of enjoyable times past. It was noted that tourists might be successfully drawn to sporting venues or events that brought back pleasant memories by appealing to their sense of nostalgia. Researchers have verified that nostalgia has a favorable impact on the behaviors of sports tourism consumers, such as their location preference and general contentment (Weingarten & Wei, 2023).

Furthermore, posting sentimental content on social media can greatly increase a destination's appeal and encourage customer interaction (Razzaq & Akhtar, 2024).

Research Objectives

- To find the role of social media in promoting sports tourism.
- To examine the future prospects of sports tourism in Pakistan.

Research Questions

1. What is the role of social media in sports tourism in Pakistan.
2. What are future prospects of sports tourism in Pakistan?

Literature Review

In an effort to draw in travelers who have a fondness for past sporting events and famous people, sports organizations and travel agencies are increasingly using digital platforms and social media to broadcast nostalgic content (Jacobsen & Beer, 2021). This tactic not only strengthens the brand's reputation but

also encourages customer participation (Marine-Roig, Martin-Fuentes, & Daries-Ramon, 2017). Additional research indicates that nostalgia marketing can simultaneously improve sports tourism and increase consumer understanding of the places' cultural and historical significance (Ifeta, 2023). Sports events have a complicated and multidimensional effect on sports tourism, encompassing not just the immediate consequences of the events but also the locations' long-term appeal and reputation (Ziakas, 2023). Numerous studies have demonstrated that holding athletic events may greatly increase a destination's visibility, draw a sizable visitor population, and benefit the local economy (Ovechkin, 2024).

Major sporting events like the Olympics, World Cup, and Asian Games can boost tourism revenue by drawing in more tourists in addition to garnering international attention (Gholipour, Arjomandi, Marsiglio, & Foroughi, 2020).

The study identifies how sporting events might increase demand for short-term travel while also highlighting how events may help cities or nations become more appealing in the long run. Additionally, it was investigated how sporting events might boost the growth of sports tourism by improving the perception and awareness of travel locations. Sports events offer towns distinctive marketing possibilities, enabling them to highlight their distinctive natural features and culture, drawing tourists who want to experience local life in addition to the events (Zagnoli & Radicchi, 2009). By gathering and examining large volumes of data from social media, marketers can spot trends, track brand reputation, and modify marketing tactics to better suit the needs of travelers. Social media analysis is essential to sports tourism marketing strategies because it gives marketers a thorough grasp of the behaviors, preferences, and interaction patterns of the target audience (Miah, Vu, Gammack, & McGrath, 2017).

Sports tourism destinations have never-before-seen chances to uncover and capitalize on the true sentiments and preferences of travelers through data analysis on social media platforms (Vassakis, Petrakis, Kopanakis, & Makridis, 2021).

For example, marketers can determine the most well-liked products or services and possible areas for improvement by examining conversations and comments around particular sporting events or travel destinations (Pike & Page, 2014). Furthermore, social media sentiment analysis can show how the public feels about sporting events (Alaei, Becken, & Stantic, 2019), thereby helping marketers modify their communication tactics to increase positive feelings or lessen negative effects (Geetha, Singha, & Sinha, 2017).

According to research, earned media such as vlogs, user-generated content, and influencer posts—often has a greater impact on travelers' decisions than sponsored ads. Travelers place more trust in the experiences of their peers than in advertising from travel agencies (Rafiq, Lakho, & Jaffiry, 2023).

As a multifaceted commercial activity, tourism has enormous potential to boost the economy and reduce poverty (Arshad, 2018). Sports tourism locations can obtain important insights into industry best practices and unmet client needs by keeping an eye on competitors' social media activity (Asdullah, Ahmad, & Parveen, 2015).

The fact that the tourist sector accounts for 10% of the global economy's GDP enables one to assess the industry's potential (Beech, Rigby, Talbot, & Thandi, 2005). Along with its ability to pay taxes and contribute foreign currencies, tourists also seek services and purchase goods and food while they are in the national territory (Haq, Ullah, & Sajjad., 2019).

Additionally, marketers may forecast shifts in travel demand and modify their promotional efforts to deliver the right message to the right audience at the right time by monitoring and evaluating social media trends and subjects (Moayad, Abdellatif, Mohamed, & Abdelhafez, 2024). For instance, marketers can act fast to capitalize on a sudden surge in interest in a sporting event by providing exclusive deals or engaging activities on social media (Yuniarti, Aziz, & Gani, 2024).

The perception of the nation abroad is a significant factor in the choice of destination for tourists. Any serious attempt to design a sporting event with the intention of drawing tourists must take into account

the country's reputation, both good and bad. Players, Pakistan's sport board, and officials from the Punjab and KPK sports tourism departments frequently cited the nation's unfavorable reputation as a bottleneck. A lot of terrible things had happened in the past ten years, particularly the attack on the Sri Lankan team, which was a blow to the country's ability to host sporting events (Liang, Iqbal, & Alam, 2021).

Numerous studies have discovered a negative relationship between tourism and a bad perception of the nation. When tourists choose a destination, the perception of the nation is crucial. For example, a few years ago, when it was announced that Pakistan would host the PSL semifinals and final, several international players declined to visit the country (Hussain, Chen, & Nurunnabi, 2019).

Pakistan is home to numerous tourist destinations that are worth viewing, such as deserts, mountains, seashores, lakes, and mountain tops covered in glaciers. Additionally, the variety of cultures and friendly locals add to the enjoyment of the trip (Dogar, Shah, & Elahi, 2021).

Because of all of this, Pakistan is a great destination for tourists. Unfortunately, due to massive damage to its economy and infrastructure, Pakistan was unable to match the number of tourists arriving in the nation with its tourism potential (Hussain, Chen, & Nurunnabi, 2019).

Since then, though, things have much improved. The improvement in the state of law and order was not used to enhance the nation's reputation and draw in foreign visitors (Asdullah, Ahmad, & Parveen, 2015).

Social media plays a variety of roles in sports tourism marketing, as demonstrated by previous studies. These include boosting places' appeal and brand image, encouraging sporting events and nostalgia, and using social media analytics to improve marketing tactics. These papers highlight research gaps and difficulties in this area while offering a thorough grasp of how social media might be used as a tool for sports tourism marketing (Kurtzman, 2005).

First off, while a lot of study has been done on social media's marketing purposes, there is still a dearth of studies on its long-term impacts. This disparity is important as creating successful marketing strategy requires an awareness of the long-term effects of social media activity (Arif & Shikirullah, 2019).

Even though there is a wealth of study on social media's marketing capabilities, there is still a dearth of studies on its long-term impacts. This disparity is important as creating successful marketing strategy requires an awareness of the long-term effects of social media activity. Marketers can more effectively modify their tactics to get consistent consumer engagement and brand loyalty by monitoring and evaluating the effects of social media marketing initiatives over an extended period of time. Second, although tailored marketing is thought to be a successful tactic for raising visitor engagement, it is still difficult to produce tailored material that satisfies the various tastes of various travelers (Dogar, Shah, & Elahi, 2021).

For more accurate target marketing, this calls for a deeper comprehension of visitor behavior and preferences as well as the application of sophisticated data analytics tools. Another difficulty is making efficient use of social media data. There is a need for further research and development in social media analysis methods and tools since social media provides a multitude of data, and it takes increasingly sophisticated analytic tools and techniques to extract valuable information from it and turn it into actionable insights (Arshad, 2018).

Another difficulty brought on by the quick development of social media platforms and technology is preserving the flexibility and adaptation of marketing plans. The effectiveness of sports tourism marketing plans depends on the ability to swiftly adjust and make efficient use of the new social media platforms and communication channels that are emerging (Arshad, 2018).

Methodology

This research uses qualitative content analysis. Various frames have been used to study social media content related to sports tourism in Pakistan. Researchers investigate the subject using themes,

patterns, and discursive meanings discovered in social media content for a conceptual qualitative content analysis, including:

Images (pictures, videos)

Hashtags and captions

Remarks and conversations

Brand narratives and influencers

This study concentrate on the ways that social conceptions of place, identity, and experience arise in Pakistani sports tourism.

Results and Discussion

In Pakistan, sports tourism, traveling to see or take part in athletic events, is a new but undeveloped industry. The way that sports events and places are viewed, advertised, and experienced is greatly influenced by social media's enormous reach and narrative-building capabilities. This investigation looks at how social media material reflects, shapes, and influences sports tourism in Pakistan.

National Identity & Pride through Sports Events

Social media posts regarding sporting activities, such as polo festivals, cricket matches, or jeep rallies, frequently foster a sense of resilience, solidarity, and patriotism.

For example, posts that depict the responses of the fans at international cricket matches in Karachi or Lahore inspire feelings of patriotism. Tags and comments such as “put Pakistan on the map” or “show the real Pakistan” are significant. Moreover, by promoting positive identity reinforcement, sports tourism content helps dispel unfavorable misconceptions about the nation.

In Pakistan, sporting events are effective means of expressing and reaffirming pride in the country, especially when they are promoted on social media. International cricket series, major competitions like the Pakistan Super League (PSL), and customary occasions like the Shandur Polo Festival all turn into occasions for emotional bonding, solidarity, and celebration. Users frequently post pictures, videos, and introspective thoughts on social media sites like Twitter, Instagram, and TikTok, framing these occurrences as representations of resiliency, advancement, and cultural diversity. During these events, hashtags like #CricketComesHome or #ProudPakistani spread, representing a common story of national rebirth and worldwide rebirth. In addition to promoting pride at home, these digital manifestations also change how the world views Pakistan, establishing sports tourism as a unifying cultural force and a calculated means of enhancing the country's reputation.

Presenting Pakistan as an Unexplored Adventure Travel Spot

Mountain climbing, paragliding, skiing, and desert racing are examples of adventure sports tourism that is frequently presented as a secret treasure just waiting to be found. Hashtags such as #AdventurePakistan or #UntouchedBeauty are significant in promoting Pakistan's potential in sports tourism. Particularly, when combined with first-person accounts from international travelers or athletes, social media aids in reestablishing Pakistan's reputation as a fun and safe travel destination. With its stunning mountains, wild rivers, expansive deserts, and pristine coastline, Pakistan is a hidden paradise for adventure and sports travelers just waiting to be explored. The nation provides an exhilarating blend of extreme activities and scenic beauty, from paragliding over the majestic valleys of Hunza to skiing on the snow-covered slopes of Naltar, off-roading through the untamed landscapes of Balochistan, or diving into the azure waters of Gwadar. Pakistan can be repositioned as a top

adventure travel destination where every turn presents a fresh challenge and every journey tells a tale worth telling through visually appealing social media content, athlete partnerships, and genuine storytelling.

Safety Perceptions via Social Media

In general, Pakistani sports tourism has a mixed social media portrayal. First-time and risk-averse travelers are discouraged by negative sentiment, which is exacerbated by worries about safety, mob justice, inadequate infrastructure, and violent incidents. Positive testimonies from real tourists emphasize the nation's friendliness and scenic splendor, providing optimism for a shift in perception. Moreover, effective storytelling that emphasizes adventure and peaceful culture can balance out the predominant fear-based representation. Extreme caution is advised in border areas and conflict-prone provinces like Baluchistan and parts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, according to official travel recommendations like those issued by the UK Foreign Office. These warnings were widely shared on social media. However, real fears are also reflected on social media. Prior to a PSL game, a drone incident near Rawalpindi Stadium sparked fresh discussions about safety as rumors of sabotage circulated amid escalating regional tensions. Furthermore, it was generally believed that holding the Champions Trophy 2025, which featured teams from important cricketing nations, was a significant step in enhancing the nation's reputation as a safe and feasible venue for big international athletic events.

Local Culture Meets Global Sports Fandom

Social media serves as a conduit between local expression and international sports culture. A blend of contemporary sports fanaticism and local street culture can be seen in tweets or TikToks during the Pakistan Super League (PSL). Local terminology, music, and language are frequently included in posts. Such content provides attractive narratives for Pakistan's potential as an ideal location for sports tourism. By fostering a hybrid cultural identity, this content helps young people in the area feel like they belong to a global society while preserving their local identity, which appeals to both cultural and sporting tourists.

Digital & Social Media Promotion

A more thorough examination highlights the ways in which social media platforms successfully showcase Pakistan's vibrant heritage and natural landscapes. There are certain perceptions that can be modified or improved through digital and social media engagement. For example; foreign impressions can be changed by influencers and tourists sharing visual storytelling (pictures, videos). Trust is built and trip planning is facilitated by real-time reviews and community input (e.g., travel blogs, TripAdvisor, Reddit). Before departing, prospective tourists can explore locations like Shangri-La Resort, Hunza bazaars, and Badshahi Mosque with the aid of virtual tours and VR material. Moreover, online booking systems and targeted digital advertisements have improved the efficiency and accessibility of trip planning.

Inclusion and Gender in Sports Tourism

Stories of female athletes, fans, and tourists shattering preconceptions are becoming more and more prominent on social media. For example, content that goes viral that shows female cricket fans, Gilgit-Baltistan football players, or hikers. Both cultural conflict and support can be shown in comment sections. These stories question gender norms and reframe sports tourism as a more inclusive field. Social media turns as a forum for promoting and normalizing female involvement. Although they are becoming more and more visible, inclusion and gender representation in sports tourism, especially on social media, remain problematic, particularly in nations like Pakistan. With female athletes, adventurers, and influencers showcasing their involvement in traditionally male-dominated sports like

mountaineering, bicycling, and paragliding on sites like Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok, social media has emerged as a potent weapon for shattering preconceptions. These stories question gender role conventions in society while also encouraging local women to investigate sports tourism. But the digital realm also exposes persistent obstacles that prevent more female engagement, including safety worries, a lack of infrastructure for women, and social scrutiny. Social media continues to be a vital tool for elevating these perspectives and normalizing gender diversity in adventure tourism. Campaigns that showcase women-led expeditions, inclusive athletic events, and supporting community networks are essential to bringing about significant change.

Digital representation and expert validation

Social media serves as a platform for prospective sports visitors to establish trust. Real-life experiences going to a game or trekking to a sporting event are described in vlogs, forums, or Facebook reviews. When making travel plans, travelers frequently rely on the posts of others. Peer-driven validation takes the place of traditional advertising on social media, which turns into a collective storehouse of shared experiences.

The way sports tourism is portrayed digitally in Pakistan is progressively changing, combining unadulterated adventure, cultural diversity, and unexplored natural settings. Content showcasing extreme activities like rock climbing in Margalla Hills, paragliding in Hunza, skiing in Naltar, and desert rallies in Cholistan is becoming more and more prevalent on platforms like YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok. Local sportsmen, vloggers, and influencers are crucial in changing people's opinions since they frequently showcase Pakistan's natural beauty, friendliness, and the excitement of discovering uncharted territory.

Nevertheless, this representation is still mainly unstructured and does not have a cohesive national story or branding approach. Global perceptions have shifted from security worries to interest and excitement thanks in part to internet content, but problems still exist because of uneven quality, few international partnerships, and a lack of government support for digital efforts. Pakistan requires a more professional and organized strategy that incorporates targeted marketing, narrative, and collaborations with international sports and tourism platforms in order to fully utilize the potential of digital media.

Challenges & Gaps in the Promotion of Sports Tourism

Even while tourism material is becoming more and more prevalent, local governments and sports organizations are not using organized promotion or smart digital marketing. Tourism boards post inconsistently. absence of content that is accessible or multilingual. This limits social media's ability to fully promote sports tourism since it shows a disconnect between institutional digital strategy and grassroots digital excitement. The growth of sports tourism in Pakistan is hampered by a number of significant obstacles and gaps, despite the industry's enormous potential. The absence of a unified infrastructure is one of the main problems, which includes weak emergency response systems, insufficient sports facilities, and difficult road access to far-flung adventure locations.

With little international reach and uneven branding between travel authority, marketing initiatives are dispersed. Potential tourists are still put off by perceived and actual safety issues, which are made worse by inadequate media management and crisis communication on social media. Stakeholder coordination is also lacking, with limited cooperation between local communities, private travel companies, and government agencies.

Broad participation in adventure sports is further restricted by the lack of gender-inclusive legislation and the underrepresentation of women and underprivileged groups. To establish Pakistan as a reputable and competitive sports tourism destination, these shortcomings must be filled by strategic investment, training, digital promotion, and inclusive policymaking.

Future Potential in Sports Tourism

Pakistan's sports tourism industry has a lot of promise because of its exciting events and scenic surroundings. However, because of limitations in infrastructure, legislation, and culture, it is still underdeveloped. Although there hasn't been much focused investigation, the media and possibly social media could spur growth. Social media and sports tourism in Pakistan have enormous unrealized potential for the future, providing chances for international exposure, cultural interchange, and economic expansion. Pakistan has the foundation for a flourishing sports tourism sector thanks to its varied landscape, which encourages adventure sports like trekking, skiing, and paragliding; traditional events like polo in Shandur and jeep rallies in Cholistan; and a fervent cricket and other sports fan base.

Social media serves as a dynamic enabler of this expansion, enabling low-cost destination branding, community interaction, and real-time promotion. Platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube may be strategically leveraged to spotlight local talent, promote sporting events, and draw in both domestic and foreign tourists as digital connectivity spreads throughout the nation and Gen Z emerges as the primary online audience.

Pakistan may establish itself as a growing destination for distinctive, culturally diverse, and daring sports tourism experiences with improved collaboration between tourism boards, sports authorities, and digital influencers. This potential might be further enhanced by investments in digital marketing, narrative, and infrastructure, particularly in underrepresented areas. As a result, sports tourism could play a significant role in Pakistan's soft power and tourist resurgence.

Conclusion

Social media, which serves as a forum for experience sharing, cultural exchange, and identity creation, is essential to the development and promotion of sports tourism in Pakistan. From narrative power and gender inclusion to weaknesses in digital strategy, the qualitative themes highlight both opportunities and difficulties. In Pakistan, the nexus of social media and sports tourism is a vibrant, developing area with enormous promise. Social media has already started to change the perception of Pakistan by emphasizing its fervent sports culture, beautiful locations, and devoted following. In ways that traditional media frequently ignores, it promotes community involvement, amplifies local and global events, and allows real-time storytelling. Even while there are still issues like poor infrastructure, erratic digital marketing, and a lack of local voices, the increasing accessibility of social media platforms presents a special chance to close these gaps. In the future, Pakistan can establish itself as a desirable location for international sports tourism with strategic investment, inclusive content production, and improved cooperation between the public and private sectors as well as digital influencers. Through proper use of social media, the nation can improve its international reputation and cultural influence in addition to strengthening its economy.

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