Unveiling Digital Influences: How Social Media Shapes Tourism Behavior in Boek Phrai Community-based Tourism, Ban Pong District, Ratchaburi Province, Thailand

Chaisak Klaidaeng[a], Supaphorn Akkapin[b*] and Aswin Techajareonvikul[a]

[a]Department of Hotel, Faculty of Liberal Arts, Rajamangala University of Technology Krungthep, Bangkok, Thailand
[b]Department of Tourism, Faculty of Liberal Arts, Rajamangala University of Technology Krungthep, Bangkok, Thailand
[*]Corresponding author. E-mail address: supaphorn.a@mail.rmutk.ac.th

Abstract

This study examines the impact of social media on tourism dynamics in Boek Phrai Sub-district, Ban Pong District, Ratchaburi Province, Thailand. Using a quantitative approach, data were collected through questionnaires from 400 Thai tourists to evaluate the influence of social media platforms on their travel decision-making. Statistical analyses, including Pearson's correlation and multiple regression, demonstrate a strong positive correlation between social media awareness and travel intentions, particularly among younger, educated tourists. Key factors influencing travel decisions include the perceived usefulness of social media ($\beta = 0.529$), attraction appeal in social media content ($\beta = 0.454$), and recognition of travel preparation information ($\beta = 0.279$). The findings highlight the critical role of User-generated Content (UGC), social media Word-of-Mouth (WOM), and engaging visuals in shaping tourist behavior. These insights underscore the importance of strategic social media engagement to promote lesser-known destinations like Boek Phrai, Ratchaburi Province, contributing to sustainable tourism and community-based economic growth in Thailand.

Keywords: Social Media, Community-Based Tourism, User-generated Content, Decision-Making, Social Media Marketing

Introduction

Overview of Thailand's Tourism Sector

Tourism in Thailand remains a vital economic driver, blending rich cultural heritage with modern attractions. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, the country generated approximately 3 trillion Baht (about 84.64 billion USD) in tourism revenue (The Nation, 2023). In 2022, following a robust post-pandemic recovery, Thailand welcomed 11.15 million foreign tourists, a significant increase from just 428,000 in 2021 (Thepgumpanat, 2023; Strangio, 2023). Domestic tourism also grew substantially, with around 150.8 million trips generating 6.3 billion Baht (177.71 million USD) in revenue (Kasikorn Research Center, 2022). However, the pandemic significantly impacted Thailand's economy, necessitating a re-evaluation of tourism strategies with an emphasis on sustainability and diversification (Behsudi, 2020; UN Tourism, n.d.; Rivera et al., 2024). As part of these new strategies, leveraging technology—particularly social media—has emerged as a cornerstone for promoting sustainable tourism development.

Thailand's appeal as a travel destination is underscored by its ability to offer tourists a rich and diverse experience. Cities like Bangkok showcase a blend of modernity and tradition, while destinations like Phuket, Koh Samui, and Chiang Mai offer tropical paradise and cultural immersion. The country's culinary heritage and renowned hospitality further enhance its global tourist appeal. However, the impact of the pandemic on Thailand's economy has prompted a re-evaluation of tourism strategies, focusing on sustainability and diversification to build resilience in the sector (Behsudi, 2020; UN Tourism, n.d.; Rivera et al., 2024).

The growth of tourism in Thailand has been significantly propelled by advancements in technology, particularly through the widespread use of social media platforms. Social media has evolved into an essential tool for influencing tourist behavior, shaping decision-making, and promoting lesser-known destinations. Social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and TripAdvisor have evolved from mere communication tools into powerful channels that shape tourist behavior and decision-making. By fostering an interactive space where users can share experiences and access valuable insights, social media plays a pivotal role in promoting community-based tourism. This direct interaction empowers smaller, local communities to connect with potential tourists, fostering more authentic and sustainable travel experiences. Their ability to influence perceptions, especially through visually engaging content and User-generated reviews, makes them essential tools for tourism marketing. For example, the attractive portrayal of destinations on these platforms often motivates tourists to explore lesser-known destinations, offering both cultural immersion and sustainable economic opportunities.

This study focuses on Boek Phrai, a community-based tourism destination in Ratchaburi Province, Thailand, to explore the role of social media in shaping travel decisions. Boek Phrai represents the untapped potential of rural tourism, where cultural heritage and local traditions thrive. By leveraging social media, such destinations can enhance visibility, attract diverse audiences, and promote sustainable tourism practices.

The research aims to examine how social media narratives influence tourists' awareness, engagement, and decision-making processes, providing actionable insights for tourism stakeholders and policymakers.

Role of Awareness and Perception in Tourism Choices

Tourists' awareness and perception are crucial factors influencing their travel choices and behaviors. Tourists' awareness of a destination's attractions, cultural elements, and safety standards significantly impacts their perception and decision-making process (Kim & Hall, 2019). Awareness shapes how tourists perceive a destination, which, in turn, influences travel intention and overall satisfaction (Ervina & Octaviany, 2022). Previous studies suggest that increased awareness, especially through social media, enhances tourists' confidence and engagement with lesser-known destinations, thus promoting sustainable tourism in local communities (Rungchavalnont, 2022). Therefore, understanding tourists' perceptions can aid tourism marketers and policymakers in tailoring promotional strategies that align with travelers' expectations and concerns, supporting both Community-based Tourism (CBT) and sustainable tourism objectives.

Community-based Tourism (CBT) in Thailand

Community-based Tourism (CBT) has emerged as a strategic focus within Thailand's tourism sector, contributing to economic recovery and sustainable growth. CBT emphasizes empowering local communities to manage tourism resources, preserve cultural heritage, and foster economic resilience. This model provides a pathway for smaller, lesser-known communities in Thailand—such as Boek Phrai in Ratchaburi Province—to attract tourism revenue while maintaining cultural integrity (Kontogeorgopoulos et al., 2014; Rungchavalnont, 2022; Designated Areas for Sustainable Tourism Administration, 2021a). Through CBT, local champions are encouraged to take leadership roles, facilitating income distribution and promoting sustainable community development (Connell & Rugendyke, 2008; Designated Areas for Sustainable Tourism Administration, 2021a).

Social Media's Role in Tourism

In the modern era, social media have dramatically reshaped how travelers discover, choose, and engage with destinations. Platforms like Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, and TripAdvisor, along with the Chinese platform LittleRedBook (Xiaohongshu), play pivotal roles in influencing travel decisions through User-generated Content

(UGC) and influencer endorsements (Parra-López et al., 2012; Fotis, 2015; Wong et al., 2020; Liu et al., 2020). Authentic and relatable content shared by influencers motivates travelers to explore new destinations, while real-time updates and peer recommendations significantly shape travel plans (Dewayani et al., 2023; Seeler et al., 2019; Meehan et al., 2016; Buhalis & Foerste, 2015). This social media transformation has become a critical factor in the evolution of the tourism industry (Cuomo et al., 2022; Xiang et al., 2021).

Ratchaburi province, located just 80 kilometers from Bangkok, exemplifies the integration of social media with tourism. With its natural, cultural, and historical attractions, the province is increasingly recognized for its potential in eco-tourism and cultural tourism, aligning with global trends emphasizing sustainability and authentic travel experiences (Designated Areas for Sustainable Tourism Administration, 2021b). Specifically, the Boek Phrai Sub-district, situated near the Mae Klong River, is rich in cultural heritage and home to the Lao Wiang community, an ethnic group with deep historical roots and traditions (O'Kane, 2022; Grabowsky, 1999; Baker & Phongpaichit, 2022; Baffie, 2003; Sriubon, 2023).

Thailand's government policies, such as the One Tambon One Product (OTOP) initiative, encourage local and community development to foster economic self-reliance. These policies aim to preserve cultural identity while promoting economic growth (Office of the National Economic and Social Development Council, Office of the Prime Minister, 2022; Deedenkeeratisakul & Chatprasert, 2022). In line with these initiatives, community-based tourism in regions like Boek Phrai is supported by social media platforms that amplify local voices, showcase unique cultural assets, and connect communities to a global audience. Online and social media provide essential tools for promoting local tourism, enhancing economic development, and protecting cultural heritage.

Research Objectives

1. To assess the relationship between social media awareness and tourists' travel intentions to visit Boek Phrai.

2. To analyze the mediating role of cultural and safety perceptions in the relationship between social media engagement and travel decisions.

3. To evaluate the influence of social media factors, such as perceived attractiveness and accessibility, on tourists' decision-making processes.

4. To identify critical social media factors, including engagement and preparation information, that influence tourists' travel preparation and decisions.

Research Hypotheses:

1. **H1:** There is a significant positive relationship between social media awareness and tourists' travel intentions to visit Boek Phrai.

2. **H2:** Cultural and safety perceptions mediate the relationship between social media engagement and tourists' travel decisions.

3. **H3:** Social media awareness significantly influences tourists' perceptions of the attractiveness and accessibility of Boek Phrai as a community-based tourism destination.

4. **H4:** Social media factors, including content quality and preparation information, significantly influence tourists' travel preparation and decisions.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study aims to investigate the influence of social media awareness and engagement on tourists' travel behaviors, particularly in the context of Boek Phrai's community-based tourism. It is structured around three main variables that guide the analysis:

Independent Variables (IV)

– **Social Media Awareness (X1):** The degree to which tourists are aware of and exposed to social media content related to the destination.

– **Social Media Engagement (X2):** The extent of tourists' interaction with and involvement in social media platforms.

Mediating Variables (MV)

– **Tourist Perception of Attractiveness (M1):** How tourists perceive the appeal of the destination through social media content.

– **Accessibility and Facilities (M2):** Tourists' perception of the ease of access and availability of necessary facilities at the destination.

– **Travel Preparation Information (M3):** The role of information provided through social media in preparing tourists for their trips, including cultural and safety guidance.

Dependent Variable (DV)

– **Tourists' Decision to Visit Boek Phrai (Y):** The likelihood and intention of tourists to choose Boek Phrai as a travel destination.

This framework integrates the relationships between these variables, emphasizing the mediating effects of cultural and safety perceptions as well as the destination's attractiveness. It highlights how awareness and engagement with social media platforms can shape tourists' perceptions and decisions.

The diagram below visually represents the conceptual framework, showing the connections between independent variables, mediating variables, and the dependent variable.
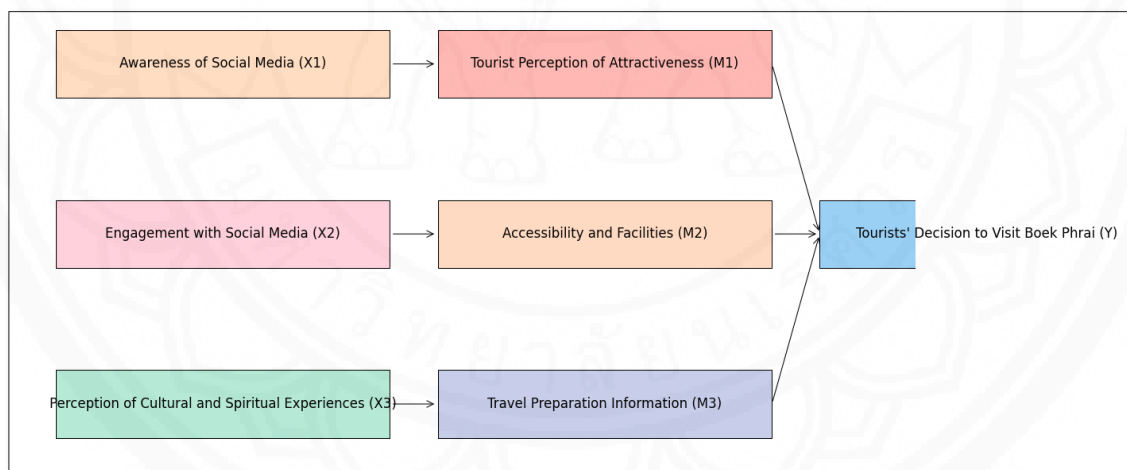
Figure 1 Conceptual Framework of Social Media Influences on Tourism Decisions.

Methods and Materials

Research Design and Sampling Technique

This study employed a quantitative research design to examine the influence of social media on tourism decision-making processes regarding Boek Phrai, a community-based tourism destination in Ratchaburi Province, Thailand. Data were collected from a sample of 400 Thai tourists, determined using Taro Yamane's formula (1967) to ensure statistical reliability and representativeness.

The formula was applied based on an estimated population size of 2,252,679 individuals (Tourism and Sports Office, Ratchaburi Province, 2024), representing the number of domestic tourists recorded in Ratchaburi Province in 2023. Using a 95% confidence level and a 5% margin of error, the calculated sample size was approximately 399.8, which was rounded to 400 for practical implementation.

Simple random sampling was employed to ensure the sample was representative of the broader tourist population, encompassing diverse demographics and travel behaviors. This sampling approach minimizes selection bias, ensuring the findings can be generalized to similar community-based tourism contexts in Thailand.

The choice of 400 respondents reflects the study's goal to capture a comprehensive understanding of tourist behavior, accounting for potential non-responses or incomplete surveys. This robust sample size allows for reliable statistical analysis and enhances the study's credibility. By incorporating recent 2023 statistics and detailing the population size and methodology, this section highlights the relevance and rigor of the research design in addressing contemporary tourism trends in Ratchaburi Province.

Materials

A structured questionnaire was designed, and divided into three sections:

1. **Demographic Information**: Collects basic respondent details such as age, gender, and educational background.

2. **Social media Awareness**: Assesses tourists' usage of and exposure to social media platforms, including perceived influence on travel decisions.

3. **Decision-making Influences**: Evaluate factors influencing travel intentions and perceptions of Boek Phrai, including attraction, accessibility, and cultural experiences.

Sections 2 and 3 use a 5-point Likert scale ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree". The questionnaire underwent expert review to ensure content validity and relevance to the research objectives. A pre-test yielded a Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient of 0.90 indicates high internal consistency and reliability.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data collection for this study utilized a hybrid approach, combining online distribution and onsite data collection at the research location. This method ensured broad participation and improved the representativeness of the sample. Completed questionnaires were carefully reviewed to confirm accuracy and completeness before the analysis phase.

Data analysis was performed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software to ensure precision and reliability. Pearson's correlation coefficient was applied to assess the relationships between variables, with a particular focus on examining how social media awareness relates to travel decision-making. Additional statistical techniques were employed to identify the key factors influencing tourists' decisions to visit Boek Phrai, offering robust insights aligned with the research objectives and hypotheses.

Statistical Methods

This study employed statistical methods to examine the relationships between variables related to social media awareness and tourism decision-making. The analysis process was conducted with widely recognized statistical software (SPSS), ensuring reliability and accuracy in addressing the research objectives. The approach used in this research provides valuable insights while adhering to accepted standards of statistical practice.

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Results

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Demographic Information

The sample primarily comprised young, educated, and social media-active Thai tourists:

- **Gender:** 69% female, 31% male.
- **Age:** 36% were aged 25-29 years.
- **Education Level:** 53.5% held a bachelor's degree.
- **Employment Status:** 60.3% were employed in companies or state enterprises.
- **Income:** 39% earned between 15,001 and 20,000 Baht monthly (approximately USD 480-640).

Findings by Research Objectives and Hypotheses

Objective 1: To assess the relationship between social media awareness and tourists' travel intentions (H1).

Table 1   Descriptive Statistics of Key Variables

Variable	Mean ($\bar{x}$)	Standard Deviation (S.D.)	Minimum	Maximum
Social Media Awareness	4.21	0.66	1.00	5.00
Social Media Engagement	3.87	0.72	1.00	5.00
Perception of Cultural Experiences	4.14	0.65	1.00	5.00
Tourist Decision to Visit Boek Phrai	3.96	0.69	1.00	5.00

Table 1 presents descriptive statistics for key variables. High mean scores for Social Media Awareness ($\bar{x}$ = 4.21) and Perception of Cultural Experiences ($\bar{x}$ = 4.14) indicate that respondents are generally aware of and influenced by social media content. Additionally, Tourist Decision to Visit Boek Phrai ($\bar{x}$ = 3.96) suggests a potential positive relationship between social media awareness and travel intentions.

Table 2   Hypothesis Testing Summary

Hypothesis	Test	Statistic (t, F)	p-value	Conclusion
H1: Positive relationship between social media awareness and travel intentions	Pearson's Correlation	t-value = 7.89	< 0.05	Supported
H2: Safety and cultural experience perceptions mediate the relationship between media awareness and travel intention	Mediation Analysis	Indirect Effect = 0.154	< 0.05	Supported
H3: Social media awareness influences the perception of attractiveness and accessibility	Multiple Regression	F-statistic = 21.67	< 0.001	Supported

Hypothesis Testing for H1:

As shown in Table 2, **Pearson's correlation analysis** demonstrates that **Social Media Awareness (X1)** has a moderate positive correlation with **Tourist Decision to Travel (Y)** (r = 0.412, p < 0.01). This confirms a significant positive relationship, supporting H1. Additionally, the **t-value of 7.89 (p < 0.05)** further validates the hypothesis. These findings underscore the influence of social media awareness on shaping tourists' travel intentions to visit Boek Phrai. Also, Pearson's Correlation Analysis as shown in Table 7 confirms a significant positive correlation between social media awareness and tourists' travel intentions.

Hypothesis Testing for H1:

The results from **Pearson's correlation analysis**, as presented in Table 2, demonstrate that **Social Media Awareness (X1)** has a moderate positive correlation with **Tourist Decision to Travel (Y)** (r = 0.412, p < 0.01).

This indicates a statistically significant relationship, confirming **Hypothesis 1 (H1),** which proposed that social media awareness positively influences tourists' travel intentions.

Additionally, the t-value of 7.89 (p < 0.05) further validates the hypothesis, emphasizing the importance of social media awareness in shaping travel decisions. Furthermore, findings from **Table 7: Pearson's Correlation Analysis** corroborate this conclusion, highlighting significant positive correlations between social media awareness and tourists' travel intentions. These results underscore the critical role of social media platforms in enhancing awareness and influencing travel behavior, particularly in the context of community-based tourism destinations like Boek Phrai.

Objective 2: To analyze the mediating role of cultural and safety perceptions in the relationship between social media engagement and travel decisions (H2).

Table 3 Tourists' Perception and Awareness of Social Media's Role in Travel Decision-making

No.	Principal Factor	Mean ($\bar{x}$)	S.D.	Awareness Level
1	Type recognition and diversity of social media	4.10	0.625	High
2	Perceived benefits of social media for tourism	4.14	0.965	High
3	Perception of social media usage for tourism	4.13	0.677	High
4	**Perception of tourist attractions through media**	**4.54**	**0.476**	**Highest**
5	Perception of methods of accessing attractions online	4.13	0.666	High
6	Perception of attraction facilities	4.24	0.622	High
7	Acknowledgment of travel preparation information	4.23	0.653	High
8	Perception based on social media information for tourism	4.17	0.591	High
	Total Overall Level of Perception and Awareness	**4.21**	**0.660**	**High**

Table 3 highlights tourists' perceptions of social media's role in their decision-making. High mean scores across factors, particularly for **Perception of Tourist Attractions Through Media** ($\bar{x}$ = 4.54, SD = 0.476), emphasize the importance of engaging visual content. The overall high perception score ($\bar{x}$ = 4.21, SD = 0.660) underscores the significant role social media plays in shaping tourists' awareness and behavior.

Table 4 Principal Component Analysis (PCA) Summary of Social Media Perceptions

Component	Factor Loading	Eigenvalue	% of Variance Explained	Cumulative %
Type Recognition and Diversity of Social Media	0.72	2.64	26.4%	26.4%
Perceived Benefits of Social Media	0.68	1.85	18.5%	44.9%
Perception of Access and Facilities	0.74	1.35	13.5%	58.4%
Recognition of Travel Preparation Information	0.76	1.05	10.5%	68.9%

Table 4 presents PCA results, identifying four principal components that explain 68.9% of the variance in tourists' social media engagement and awareness. These components emphasize the diversity of social media, its perceived benefits, and the critical role of preparation guidance in influencing travel behavior.

Relevance to Objective 2:

Tables 3 and 4 together provide a foundation for analyzing how social media engagement impacts tourists' decision-making, both directly and indirectly. Key observations include:

– High perception scores for diversity, benefits, and preparation guidance underline the importance of engaging and informative social media content.

– PCA results highlight **Recognition of Travel Preparation Information (Factor Loading = 0.76)** as a pivotal component influencing tourists' confidence and decisions.

Table 5 Mediating Effects Analysis (Summary of Effects on Travel Decision)

Effect Type	Safety Perception (β)	Cultural Experience (β)	*p*-value
Direct Effect	0.357	0.503	< 0.05
Indirect Effect	0.154	0.208	< 0.05
Total Effect	0.511	0.711	< 0.05

Table 6 Mediating Effects Analysis (Detailed Mediator Analysis of Social Media Awareness Effects)

Predictor Variable	Mediator	Direct Effect (β)	Indirect Effect (β)	Total Effect (β)	Significance Level (*p*-value)
Social Media Awareness	Safety Perception	0.357	0.154	0.511	< 0.05
Social Media Awareness	Cultural Experience	0.503	0.208	0.711	< 0.05

As shown in Tables 5 and 6, **Safety Perception (β = 0.357)** and **Cultural Experience (β = 0.503)** significantly mediate the relationship between social media awareness and travel intentions. Notably, the **indirect effect through cultural experiences (β = 0.208)** highlights the importance of immersive content in driving tourist decisions.

Objective 3: To evaluate the influence of social media factors, such as perceived attractiveness and accessibility, on tourists' decision-making processes (H3).

Table 7 Pearson's Correlation Analysis of Social Media Awareness and Tourists' Travel Decisions

Variable	X1 (Recognition of Media Types)	X2 (Perceived Benefits of Social Media)	X3 (Perception of How to Use Social Media)	X4 (Perception of Attraction)	X5 (Perception of Accessibility)	X6 (Perception of Management)	X7 (Recognition of Preparation)	X8 (Perception by Characteristics)	Y (Decision to Travel)
X1 (Recognition of Media Types)	1.00	0.795*	0.891*	0.675*	0.572*	0.675*	0.610*	0.769*	0.412*
X2 (Perceived Benefits of Social Media)	0.795*	1.00	0.809*	0.819*	0.432*	0.571*	0.527*	0.676*	0.221*
X3 (Perception of How to Use Social Media)	0.891*	0.809*	1.00	0.686*	0.487*	0.616*	0.527*	0.470*	0.411*
X4 (Perception of Attraction)	0.675*	0.819*	0.686*	1.00	0.327*	0.457*	0.416*	0.563*	0.086
X5 (Perception of Accessibility)	0.572*	0.432*	0.487*	0.327*	1.00	0.884*	0.844*	0.806*	0.519*
X6 (Perception of Management)	0.675*	0.571*	0.616*	0.457*	0.884*	1.00	0.901*	0.907*	0.463*

Table 7 (Cont.)

Variable	X1 (Recognition of Media Types)	X2 (Perceived Benefits of Social Media)	X3 (Perception of How to Use Social Media)	X4 (Perception of Attraction)	X5 (Perception of Accessibility)	X6 (Perception of Management)	X7 (Recognition of Preparation)	X8 (Perception by Characteristics)	Y (Decision to Travel)
X7 (Recognition of Preparation)	0.610*	0.527*	0.527*	0.416*	0.844*	0.901*	1.00	0.850*	0.471*
X8 (Perception by Characteristics)	0.769*	0.676*	0.470*	0.563*	0.806*	0.907*	0.850*	1.00	0.462*
Y (Decision to Travel)	0.412*	0.221*	0.411*	0.086	0.519*	0.463*	0.471*	0.462*	1.00

Note: All correlations marked with * are significant at the $p < 0.01$ level.

Findings from Correlation Analysis

Table 7 provides Pearson's correlation analysis, highlighting the relationships between social media awareness variables and Tourist Decision to Travel (Y). The key findings are:

– **Perception of Accessibility (X5):** This variable demonstrates a moderate positive correlation with Tourist Decision to Travel ($r = 0.519$, $p < 0.01$), underscoring the importance of providing accessible and transparent information about destinations via social media platforms.

– **Perception of Attraction (X4):** Although this variable shows no significant correlation with travel decisions ($r = 0.086$), its inclusion in regression analysis provides further insights into its role.

These results indicate that social media content emphasizing accessibility strongly influences tourists' travel intentions, while negative portrayals of attraction-related aspects may deter potential visitors.

Findings from Regression Analysis

Results from multiple regression analysis (Table 8) confirm the role of perceived accessibility and attraction in influencing tourists' decisions:

– **Perception of Accessibility (X5):** Identified as a significant positive predictor of travel decisions ($\beta = 0.454$, $p < 0.001$). This result highlights the critical role of accessible information in motivating tourists to visit.

– **Perception of Attraction (X4):** Found to be a significant negative predictor of travel decisions ($\beta = -0.304$, $p < 0.001$). This suggests that unfavorable representations of destination attractiveness on social media can discourage travel intentions, even when accessibility is perceived positively.

These findings align with prior research emphasizing the importance of clear, engaging, and favorable representations of destinations on social media.

Summary of Variable Selection

Table 7 identifies key variables significantly correlated with the dependent variable (Tourist Decision to Travel):

- **X1:** Recognition of Media Types
- **X3:** Perception of How to Use Social Media
- **X5:** Perception of Accessibility
- **X6:** Perception of Management
- **X7:** Recognition of Preparation
- **X8:** Perception by Characteristics

While X4 (Perception of Attraction) did not meet the correlation value threshold, it was included in the regression analysis due to its theoretical relevance. Research suggests that perceived destination attractiveness, even with weak statistical significance, may influence decisions through subconscious or peripheral social media processing.

Alignment with Assumptions and Methodology

The regression analysis aligns with theoretical and methodological assumptions, ensuring the validity of the results. Preliminary tests, including linearity, homoscedasticity, and multicollinearity, were considered during model selection to ensure robust findings.

The high constant value observed in the regression model reflects the baseline level of Tourist Decision to Travel when other variables are held constant. This indicates the presence of unmeasured factors—such as personal preferences, economic conditions, and broader social influences—that contribute to travel decisions.

Conclusion for Objective 3

These findings confirm the hypothesis (H3) that social media factors significantly influence tourists' perceptions of attractiveness and accessibility, which in turn shape their decision-making processes. Emphasizing accessibility through transparent and engaging content is critical for encouraging travel, while minimizing negative portrayals of attractions is essential to maintaining destination appeal. This underscores the importance of carefully curating social media content to align with tourists' expectations and preferences.

Objective 4: To identify critical social media factors, including engagement and preparation information, that influence tourists' travel preparation and decisions (H4).

Table 8 Multiple Regression Analysis Summary of Social Media Awareness Factors Influencing Tourists' Travel Decisions

Principal Factors of Social Media Awareness	B	β	SEE	t-value	p-value
Perception of How to Use Social Media (X3)	0.509	0.529	0.096	5.307	0.000
Perception of the Attractiveness of Attractions (X4)	−0.414	−0.304	0.096	−4.297	0.000
Perception of Accessibility to Tourist Attractions (X5)	0.445	0.454	0.090	4.969	0.000
Perception of Management and Facilities (X6)	−0.319	−0.306	0.138	−2.317	0.021
Recognition of Preparation Information (X7)	0.279	0.279	0.099	2.818	0.005
Constant	17.548	–	–	–	–

Note: This model explains 39.8% of the variance in tourists' travel decisions
($R^2 = 0.398$, Adjusted $R^2 = 0.385$; F-statistic = 31.110; $p < 0.001$; SEE = 2.580).

Findings from Multiple Regression Analysis

Table 8 provides a detailed summary of the multiple regression analysis results, identifying key predictors of tourists' travel decisions. The model explains 39.8% of the variance in travel decisions ($R^2 = 0.398$, Adjusted $R^2 = 0.385$; F-statistic = 31.110; $p < 0.001$), underscoring the significant role of social media factors in influencing tourists' choices.

Key Predictors

1. Recognition of Preparation Information (X7):

- A significant predictor of travel decisions ($\beta = 0.279$, $p < 0.05$).

- Highlights the importance of providing tourists with practical, travel-ready information, such as destination-specific guidance on attractions, cultural norms, and logistical considerations.

- Reinforces the role of social media platforms as essential tools for delivering preparation-related content, increasing tourist confidence and readiness.

2. Perception of Accessibility (X5):

- A strong positive predictor of travel decisions ($\beta = 0.454$, $p < 0.001$).

- Demonstrates that easily accessible, transparent, and detailed information about destinations facilitates tourists' decision-making processes.

- Supports the need for social media campaigns that highlight user-friendly and easily navigable content, particularly for community-based destinations like Boek Phrai.

3. Perception of How to Use Social Media (X3):

- The most influential predictor ($\beta = 0.529$, $p < 0.001$).

- Reflects tourists' reliance on effective utilization of social media tools to gather relevant travel information.

4. Perception of Management and Facilities (X6):

- Identified as a negative predictor ($\beta = -0.306$, $p < 0.05$).

- Indicates that negative perceptions about destination management or facilities can deter travel intentions, emphasizing the need for accurate and positive representations on social media.

5. Perception of Attractiveness of Attractions (X4):

- Found to be a significant negative predictor ($\beta = -0.304$, $p < 0.001$).

- Suggests that unfavorable portrayals of destination attractiveness may discourage travel, even when other factors are perceived positively.

These findings confirm **Hypothesis 4 (H4)** by demonstrating that social media factors, particularly engagement and preparation information, play a pivotal role in influencing tourists' travel preparation and decisions. The results emphasize the need for targeted and high-quality social media campaigns to engage tourists effectively and enhance their travel readiness.

Strategic Implications for Tourism Stakeholders

1. Enhance Practical Content:

- Social media platforms should feature content tailored to tourists' preparation needs, including itineraries, packing tips, and cultural guidelines.

2. Highlight Accessibility:

- Transparent and user-friendly information about transportation, accommodations, and local services should be prominently displayed to attract potential tourists.

3. Leverage Social Media Engagement:

- Interactive and user-centric approaches, such as live Q & A sessions, destination walkthroughs, and traveler testimonials, can strengthen tourists' connection with the destination.

4. **Improve Destination Image:**

- Address and mitigate negative perceptions about management and facilities by showcasing improvements and positive feedback from previous visitors.

Summary of Results

Objective 1: Assessing the Relationship Between Social Media Awareness and Travel Intentions (H1)

The findings confirm a significant positive relationship ($r = 0.412$, $p < 0.01$) between social media awareness and tourists' travel intentions. This relationship underscores the influence of media diversity and engagement on decision-making, directly supporting H1.

Objective 2: Exploring the Mediating Roles of Safety and Cultural Perceptions (H2)

Results from mediation analysis indicate that safety perception ($\beta = 0.357$) and cultural experience ($\beta = 0.503$) significantly mediate the relationship between social media awareness and travel intentions. This aligns with H2, highlighting the importance of content that emphasizes safety and cultural authenticity.

Objective 3: Understanding the Influence of Social Media on Attractiveness and Accessibility (H3)

Regression analysis revealed that perceptions of accessibility ($\beta = 0.454$) positively influence travel decisions, while negative perceptions of attraction ($\beta = -0.304$) serve as deterrents. These findings support H3 by demonstrating the dual roles of media portrayal in shaping tourist behavior.

Objective 4: Identifying Key Social Media Factors Influencing Travel Decisions (H4)

The results indicate that preparation information ($\beta = 0.279$) and ease of accessibility ($\beta = 0.454$) are significant predictors of travel decisions, confirming H4. This emphasizes the value of actionable and accessible social media content for potential tourists.

Table 9   Hypotheses Summary Table

Hypothesis	Description	Test Used	Result (Supported/Not Supported)
H1	Positive relationship between social media awareness and travel intentions.	Pearson's Correlation	Supported
H2	Safety and cultural experience perceptions mediate the relationship between media awareness and travel intention.	Mediation Analysis	Supported
H3	Social media awareness influences the perception of attractiveness and accessibility.	Multiple Regression	Supported

The results confirm that critical social media factors, such as engagement and preparation information, significantly influence tourists' travel decisions. These insights underscore the importance of aligning social media strategies with tourists' informational and emotional needs. By leveraging the power of social media effectively, tourism marketers and stakeholders can enhance destination appeal, foster better preparation among tourists, and support sustainable tourism growth in community-based destinations like Boek Phrai.

Discussion

This study provides a comprehensive analysis of the significant influence that social media has on the tourism dynamics of Boek Phrai Sub-district, Ban Pong District, Ratchaburi Province. By integrating theoretical research with practical applications, it demonstrates how social media platforms, particularly those popular among young, educated Thai tourists, shape travel decision-making processes. The study successfully addresses its research

objectives, beginning with an exploration of tourists' awareness and perceptions of social media. The findings confirm a strong positive correlation between social media awareness and travel decision-making, as demonstrated by Pearson correlation analysis, supporting the first research objective. This aligns with the broader literature, which emphasizes the pivotal role of media diversity in influencing travel behavior.

The study's second objective—to analyze the role of social media in directly and indirectly influencing travel decisions—was addressed through multiple regression analysis. Key factors such as the perception of media use (X3) and the attractiveness of destinations depicted online emerged as strong predictors, explaining a significant portion of the variance in travel decisions. This robust link between social media portrayal and travel intention provides a solid foundation for the study's conclusions and highlights the effectiveness of strategic social media engagement.

The validation of the research hypotheses further reinforces the study's findings. Hypothesis 1 was supported by the strong positive relationship between social media awareness and travel decisions, underscoring the critical influence of media diversity and utility in shaping tourists' decision-making processes (Cheunkamon et al., 2020; Liu et al., 2020). Although Hypothesis 2 focused on the mediating roles of cultural and safety perceptions, the direct influence of specific platforms like Facebook (X3.1) was evident in driving travel interest. Hypothesis 3 was also supported, demonstrating that the portrayal of cultural and spiritual experiences on social media significantly influences the travel decisions of tourists, particularly those in Generation Y, when considering a visit to Boek Phrai.

This study's key insights underscore the impact of User-generated Content (UGC), social media Word-of-Mouth (WOM), and visually engaging media on travel decisions. UGC, including travel blogs, online reviews, and social media posts, significantly shapes tourists' perceptions and readiness to travel. These findings are consistent with prior studies by Marine-Roig (2019; 2022). Similarly, social media WOM, as highlighted by Litvin et al. (2008); Munar and Jacobsen (2014) and Tsai and Bui (2021), is shown to be a critical component of travel planning and destination marketing. These results advocate for targeted social media engagement to effectively guide tourists' choices.

In conclusion, this study, conducted in Ratchaburi Province, provides a nuanced understanding of how social media influences modern tourism behavior. The findings contribute to the academic discourse on the interplay between social media and tourism decision-making, offering actionable insights for industry stakeholders and policymakers. By strategically utilizing social media platforms, tourism marketers can significantly influence travel choices, enhancing the tourism appeal of destinations like Boek Phrai Sub-district. This discussion highlights the essential role of data-driven social media strategies in today's tourism landscape, underscoring the importance of aligning marketing efforts with the insights derived from this study to support sustainable tourism growth.

Conclusion and Suggestions

Conclusions

This study explored the influence of social media on tourists' decision-making processes in the context of Boek Phrai, a community-based tourism destination. The findings provide valuable insights into the complex relationships between social media awareness, cultural perceptions, and tourist behavior. Specifically:

1. Social Media Awareness and Tourist Decisions: Social media awareness positively influences tourists' travel intentions. Platforms that promote engaging and visually appealing content significantly shape tourists' perceptions and encourage visitation.

2. Mediating Role of Cultural and Safety Perceptions: Tourists' cultural and safety perceptions mediate the relationship between social media engagement and travel decisions. Immersive and authentic content enhances trust and interest in destinations.

3. Impact of Attractiveness and Accessibility: Social media significantly affects perceptions of destination attractiveness and accessibility. While positive portrayals boost interest, misrepresented or unappealing visuals can deter tourists.

4. Key Predictors of Tourist Decisions: Factors such as the quality of social media content, ease of accessibility information, and preparation details emerged as critical in influencing travel intentions. This emphasizes the importance of delivering accurate and actionable content to potential visitors.

These conclusions underscore the growing importance of leveraging social media as a strategic tool for destination marketing and community-based tourism development.

Suggestions

1. General Suggestions

1.1 Academic Suggestions

‒ Future research should analyze how different demographic and cultural factors influence the impact of social media on tourism.

‒ Investigate how alternative communication channels interact with social media to influence travel decisions.

‒ Conduct longitudinal studies to examine the long‒term effects of social media engagement on tourist loyalty and destination branding.

1.2 Commercial Suggestions

‒ Tourism operators should focus on creating culturally rich, visually engaging, and informative social media content to attract tourists.

‒ Emphasize accurate representation of attractions and ensure accessibility information is readily available to build trust among potential visitors.

‒ Design targeted campaigns to attract specific market segments, such as cultural or eco‒tourism enthusiasts, using data‒driven insights.

1.3 Policy Recommendations

‒ Policymakers should invest in digital marketing initiatives for underrepresented destinations, ensuring their inclusion in broader tourism campaigns.

‒ Provide training programs for local communities and stakeholders to enhance their social media capabilities.

‒ Develop infrastructure and services that align with the expectations set by social media portrayals, prioritizing accessibility and sustainability.

2. Suggestions for Future Research

‒ Expand the scope to include international tourists to evaluate the global applicability of social media's influence.

– Employ advanced analytical methods, such as structural equation modeling, to uncover causal relationships between variables.

– Examine the role of emerging technologies, such as virtual and augmented reality, in amplifying the impact of social media content.

– Study the influence of social media on post-visit behaviors, such as reviews and recommendations, to understand its role in reinforcing destination loyalty.

– Explore the negative effects of social media, including misinformation and negative reviews, on tourist perceptions and decision-making.

By implementing these suggestions, future studies and industry stakeholders can better understand and capitalize on the dynamic relationship between social media and tourism.

Acknowledgments

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