

The influence of social networks on the intent to visit hotels

Uticaj društvenih mreža na nameru posete hotela

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Abstract

Social media plays a crucial role in the hospitality industry, significantly influencing potential guests' intentions to visit hotels. The dynamic nature of social media allows hotels to engage directly with potential customers, shaping perceptions and building brand image. The importance of social media in decision-making processes has grown, with users relying on platforms to gather information, read reviews, and assess hotel quality. This study aims to explore the extent to which social media characteristics (perceived relevance, informativeness and interactivity), usage habits, and hotel image impact visit intention, providing insights into how these factors contribute to a guest's final decision to book a stay. Linear regression was used to test the mutual influences of variables, and the results showed that the characteristics of hotel social networks, habits of using social networks and the hotel's image on social networks positively influence the intention to visit a hotel. This research advances understanding of how social media impacts consumers' hotel visit intentions by identifying key influencing factors. The findings offer actionable insights for hotel marketers to optimize social media strategies and enhance customer engagement. By leveraging these insights, hotels can improve overall marketing effectiveness and better align their strategies with consumer preferences.

Keywords: social networks, visit intention, informativeness, habits, hotel image

Sažetak

Društveni mediji igraju ključnu ulogu u hotelskoj industriji i značajno utiču na namere potencijalnih gostiju da posete hotele. Dinamična priroda društvenih medija omogućava hotelima da direktno komuniciraju sa potencijalnim kupcima, oblikujući njihove percepcije i gradeći imidž brenda. Važnost društvenih medija u procesu donošenja odluka sve više raste, jer korisnici sve više koriste platforme za prikupljanje informacija, čitanje recenzija i procenu kvaliteta hotela. Ova studija ima za cilj da istraži u kojoj meri karakteristike društvenih mreža (percipirana relevantnost, informativnost i interaktivnost), navike korišćenja i imidž hotela utiču na nameru posete, pružajući uvide u to kako ovi faktori doprinose konačnoj odluci gosta da rezerviše boravak. Linearna regresija je korišćena za testiranje uzajamnih uticaja varijabli, i rezultati su pokazali da karakteristike hotelskih društvenih mreža, navike korišćenja društvenih mreža za oglašavanje, i imidž hotela na društvenim mrežama pozitivno utiču na nameru posete hotela. Ovo istraživanje doprinosi boljem razumevanju uticaja društvenih mreža na nameru posete hotelima identifikovanjem ključnih faktora uticaja. Rezultati nude korisne uvide za marketinške stručnjake u hotelijerstvu, omogućavajući im da optimizuju svoje strategije na društvenim mrežama i poboljšaju angažman korisnika. Primena ovih saznanja može unaprediti ukupnu marketinšku efikasnost hotela i bolje uskladiti njihove strategije sa preferencijama korisnika.

Ključne reči: društveni mediji, namera posete, informativnost, navike, imidž hotela

1. Introduction

The influence of social media on consumer behavior has gained significant attention in recent years, especially in the hospitality industry. Social media platforms like Facebook and Instagram have become essential in

travelers' decision-making processes, particularly when selecting accommodations. This trend has also been observed in the context of destination selection (Alkier & Perić, 2021). The sharing of experiences, reviews, and recommendations on these platforms has dramatically reshaped how potential guests perceive hotels (Moro et

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al., 2016). This shift has led to the need for hotels to establish and maintain a robust online presence while actively engaging with customers to shape their choices. The decision to visit a hotel is increasingly driven by social media content rather than traditional marketing alone. User-generated content, which offers an authentic view of previous guests' experiences, plays a crucial role in influencing potential visitors' intentions. According to Xiang and Gretzel (2010), online reviews and social media interactions are now pivotal in forming consumer perceptions, often more impactful than traditional advertising methods. This interaction allows hotels to communicate directly with guests, creating a more personalized and engaging customer experience (Leung et al., 2015). The marketing opportunities for the hotel industry have significantly expanded over time due to the rise in internet usage, and the advent of internet marketing and new technologies has profoundly impacted the operations of marketing managers and consumers (Verma & Verma, 2017). It is widely accepted that the expansion of marketing to social media platforms provides numerous benefits, owing to the tools and features offered by these platforms. Furthermore, the methods of collecting and analyzing user behavior data during the purchasing process can later inform decision-making on the most effective advertising strategies. Many companies across various industries utilize diverse platforms to promote their products and services and to position their brand within the consumer's mind.

2. Literature review

Various researchers have confirmed that a hotel's presence on social media can significantly influence user perceptions, thereby affecting their intention to visit. According to a study conducted by Ho et al. (2022), a positive hotel image on social media can substantially increase users' intention to visit that hotel. This positive image is built through regular posting of high-quality content, interaction with users, and transparency in communication.

Perceived Relevance is one of the most significant factors in determining how social media influences consumer behavior. The perceived relevance of social media in the hotel industry refers to the extent to which social media content and interactions are considered significant and valuable by potential guests in their decision-making process. When users find the content shared by hotels to be relevant to their needs and interests, they are more likely to engage with that content and develop a positive attitude towards the hotel. Alalwan (2018) posits that perceived relevance enhances the credibility of the information, which in turn strengthens users' trust in the hotel brand. This is supported by a study by Liang and Scammon (2013), which found that the perceived relevance of online content significantly increases consumer engagement and brand loyalty. Similarly, Casaló et al. (2017) argue that when consumers perceive social media content as relevant, they are more likely to consider the hotel for future visits, as the content resonates with their preferences and expectations. Social media platforms provide a wealth of information about

hotels, including reviews, photos, promotions, and interactions, which can significantly impact a guest's decision to book a stay. The perceived relevance of this information plays a crucial role in shaping customer attitudes and behaviors (Chen & Xie, 2008). When potential guests find social media content relevant and informative, it can enhance their perception of the hotel's brand and influence their booking intentions (Kim & Fesenmaier, 2017).

The **Informativeness** of social media content is crucial because it influences how effectively hotels can communicate their offerings and engage with their audience (Baker & Crompton, 2000). Informativeness encompasses various dimensions, including the quality of content, the relevance of information shared, and the comprehensiveness of details about the hotel's services, amenities, and promotions. Informativeness refers to the degree to which the content provides valuable and accurate information that assists consumers in making decisions (Cheung et al., 2019). According to Kaplan and Haenlein (2010), informative content is essential for building trust and credibility, which are crucial for influencing consumer decisions in the hospitality sector. In their study, Lin and Lu (2011) demonstrated that social media content, which is rich in informative details, such as customer reviews, service descriptions, and promotional offers, positively influences consumers' perceptions of hotel quality and value. The research of Zeng and Gerritsen (2014) further emphasizes that informative social media content can enhance consumers' understanding of a hotel's offerings, thereby increasing the likelihood of booking.

Interactivity in social media, within the context of the hotel industry, refers to the extent to which guests and potential customers can engage in two-way communication with hotels through social media platforms. This involves features that allow users to interact with the hotel by commenting on posts, sharing content, participating in polls, and directly messaging the hotel for inquiries or feedback (Leung et al., 2013). High interactivity enables a dynamic exchange, fostering a more personalized and engaging customer experience, which is crucial for building customer loyalty and satisfaction (Moro & Rita, 2018). Alalwan (2018) highlights that interactivity fosters a sense of connection and engagement, making consumers feel valued and heard. This finding is echoed in the research of Malthouse et al. (2016), who found that high levels of interactivity on social media platforms lead to increased customer satisfaction and a stronger emotional bond with the hotel brand. Moreover, Lu et al. (2016) argues that interactivity on social media not only enhances customer relationships but also positively influences their intention to visit, as it allows for personalized communication and immediate responses to inquiries.

The role of **Habit** in shaping visit intention is another important consideration. Habitual behavior, as noted by Limayem et al. (2007), refers to the extent to which consumers repeatedly engage in a particular behavior, such as using social media to search for travel-related

information. Ho et al. (2022) suggest that consumers who habitually rely on social media for travel planning are more likely to be influenced by the content they encounter on these platforms. This is supported by a study by Chiu et al. (2014), which found that habitual users of social media develop stronger brand preferences based on their online experiences, leading to higher visit intentions. In the hospitality context, hotels that consistently engage with habitual users on social media can effectively reinforce their brand presence and encourage repeat visits. In the context of the hotel industry, the habit of using social media refers to the extent to which consumers routinely engage with social media platforms to obtain information, interact with hotel brands, and make decisions related to hotel bookings. This habitual behavior reflects a consumer's regular and often automatic use of social media as a source for staying updated on hotel offerings, reading reviews, and seeking promotional deals. Over time, as consumers become more accustomed to using social media for these purposes, their reliance on these platforms increases, leading to a stronger influence on their decision-making processes. This habitual use can significantly affect their perceptions of a hotel's brand image and their ultimate intention to book a stay at a particular hotel. For instance, if a consumer frequently checks social media for hotel promotions or follows specific hotel brands, this habitual engagement may enhance their trust and loyalty towards those hotels. Research indicates that habitual social media use is positively associated with brand engagement and purchase intentions in the hospitality industry (Gretzel & Yoo, 2008; Leung et al., 2015). This suggests that hotels with a strong and consistent social media presence can effectively cultivate consumer habits that lead to increased bookings and customer retention.

Hotel Image portrayed on social media is critical in determining visit intention. A positive online image, as constructed through high-quality visuals, user-generated content, and positive reviews, can significantly enhance a hotel's attractiveness to potential guests (Ho et al., 2022). This is corroborated by the findings of Xiang and Gretzel (2010), who note that a well-maintained social media presence can positively influence consumers' perceptions of a hotel's brand image, thereby increasing their likelihood of booking. Kim et al., (2015) also emphasize the importance of a strong online image in building brand equity and influencing consumer behavior, particularly in the highly competitive hospitality industry.

3. Methodology

For the purposes of investigating the extent to which usage of social media influence the intention to visit hotels, a survey questionnaire was specifically designed for this study. The questionnaire used in the research consisted of two parts. The first part included questions related to the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents (gender, age, level of education, marital status). The second part of the questionnaire comprised a combination of factors - Perceived Relevance, Informativeness, Interactivity, Habits, Hotel Image, and Visit Intention.

The factors Perceived Relevance, Informativeness, Interactivity, and Habit were adopted from Alawan's study (2018). The factors Hotel Image and Visit Intention were derived from the research of a group of authors (Ho et al., 2022). A five-point Likert scale was used to express the degree of agreement with the presented statements (1 - strongly disagree, 2 - somewhat disagree, 3 - neutral, 4 - somewhat agree, 5 - strongly agree).

The first factor, Perceived Relevance, was measured using six statements related to the respondents' attitudes towards the relevance of social networks as a source of information (e.g., "Advertising on social media is relevant to me").

The second factor, Informativeness, was described through five statements that addressed attitudes towards the provision of relevant and up-to-date information on social networks (e.g., "Advertising on social media is a good source of information and provides relevant product information").

The third measured factor was Interactivity. This factor was described through five statements concerning attitudes towards encouraging users to provide feedback on products or services (e.g., "Advertising on social media is effective in gathering user feedback").

The Habit factor was measured using three statements related to the habits of using social media advertising (e.g., "Using social media advertising has become a habit for me").

The Hotel Image factor was determined through 16 statements related to user attitudes towards the hotel's image after visiting its social network profile (e.g., "After visiting the hotel's social media, I form an impression of whether the hotel offers adequate value").

The final factor examined in the questionnaire was Visit Intention. This factor was measured using eight statements related to respondents' attitudes towards the intention to visit a hotel after viewing the hotel's social media profile (e.g., "I am willing to stay at a hotel that has good recommendations on social media").

Based on the literature review, the following initial hypotheses for this research were formulated:

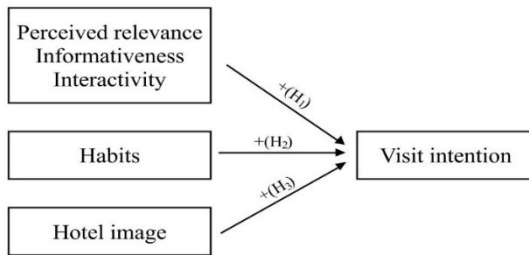
H₁: The characteristics of the hotel's social networks (Perceived relevance, Informativeness and Interactivity) have a positive impact on the guest's intention to visit hotel.

H₂ - The habits of using social networks for advertising have a positive effect on the guest's intention to visit a hotel.

H₃ - The hotel image on social networks has a positive impact on the guest's intention to visit a hotel.

The proposed research model is shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Proposed model of research



Source: Author's

Table 1. Demographic structure of respondents

	Frequency (N = 156)	
	N	%
Gender		
Male	64	41%
Female	92	59%
Employment status		
Student	52	33.3%
Employed	85	54.5%
Unemployed	11	7.1%
Retired	8	5.10%
Age		
Baby Boomer (1945-1964)	17	10.9%
X Generation (1965-1981)	36	23.1%
Y Generation (1982-1994)	18	11.5%
Z Generation (1995-2010)	85	54.2%
Marital status		
Single	55	35.3%
In a relationship	48	30.8%
Married	51	32.7%
Widowed	2	1.3%

Source: Author's calculation based on SPSS 23.0

Results of Regression Analysis

The ability to predict the intention to visit the hotel through the characteristics of hotel social networks (perceived relevance, interactivity and informativeness) was tested using multiple regression. The model is significant in explaining the intention to visit the hotel through the characteristics of social networks $F(3, 156) = 40.639, p < 0.000$. The model explains 66.7% of the variance ($R^2 = 0.667$). The results showed that informativeness ($B = 0.176, p < 0.048$) as well as interactivity ($B = 0.375, p < 0.000$) have a significant positive influence on the intention to visit, while the influence of perceived relevance ($B = 0.076, p < 0.308$) is not statistically significant. The obtained results partially confirmed H_1 , i.e., that the characteristics of the hotel's social networks have a positive influence on the intention to visit the hotel. Results are showed in Table 2.

Table 2. The predictive effect of independent variables on the intention to visit

Independent variables	Dependent variable: Visit intention		
	Beta	t	Sig.
Perceived Relevance	0.100	1.022	0.308
Informativeness	0.216	1.994	0.048
Interactivity	0.413	4.568	0.000

Source: Author's calculation based on SPSS 23.0

The ability to predict the intention to visit the hotel through the habits of using social networks was tested using a single linear regression (Table 7). The model is significant in explaining the intention to visit the hotel through the habits of using social networks $F(1, 156) = 13.483, p < 0.000$. The model explains 28.4% of the variance ($R^2 = 0.284$). The results showed that the habits of using social media significantly predict the intention to visit the hotel ($B = 0.227, p < 0.000$). The obtained results confirmed H_2 , i.e., that the habits of using social networks for advertising have a positive influence on the intention to visit the hotel. Table 3 displays the results.

Table 3. The predictive effect of the habit of using social networks on the intention to visit

Independent variable	Dependent variable: Visit intention		
	Beta	t	Sig.
Habits	0.284	3.672	0.000

Source: Author's calculation based on SPSS 23.0

The possibility to predict the intention to visit the hotel through the image of the hotel on social networks was tested using a single linear regression (Table 8). The model is significant in explaining the intention to visit the hotel through the image of the hotel on social networks $F(1, 156) = 74.588, p < 0.000$. The model explains 57.1% of the variance ($R^2 = 0.571$). The results showed that the image of the hotel on social networks significantly predicts the intention to visit the hotel ($B = 0.626, p < 0.000$). The obtained results confirmed H_3 , i.e., that the image of the hotel on social networks has a positive influence on the intention to visit the hotel (Table 4).

Table 4. Predictive effect of hotel image on social networks on visit intention

Independent variable	Dependent variable: Visit intention		
	Beta	t	Sig.
Hotel image	0.571	8.636	0.000

Source: Author's calculation based on SPSS 23.0

4. Discussion and conclusion

Social media has become an indispensable tool in the hospitality industry, significantly influencing customer perceptions and decision-making processes. Hotels that actively engage with customers through social media platforms, providing consistent and relevant content, are more likely to enhance their brand image and foster customer loyalty (Xiang & Gretzel, 2010). The interactive nature of social media allows hotels to create personalized experiences, respond to customer feedback promptly, and build a sense of community, which in turn positively impacts the intention to visit (Leung et al., 2013). Furthermore, studies have shown that social media's informativeness and perceived relevance are critical factors in shaping customers' attitudes toward hotel brands (Alalwan, 2018). Therefore, maintaining a robust social media presence is not only beneficial but essential for hotels aiming to remain competitive in today's digital landscape.

For the purposes of this study, three hypotheses were formulated and tested using linear regression. All hypotheses of this study were fully or partially confirmed by the conducted survey. Ho et al. (2022) found that perceived relevance, alongside factors like informativeness and interactivity, significantly enhances the hotel's image, which in turn strengthens the intention to visit. If a hotel actively uses social media by regularly posting quality content, it significantly positively impacts users' perceptions of the hotel. Users gain the impression that the hotel cares about their opinions and feel that they have the opportunity to directly connect with the hotel. Additionally, users form impressions about what makes the hotel special, whether it possesses the desired quality, services, and values. Thanks to social media, companies can establish close and long-term relationships with clients, as well as gain their trust. Research has shown that the interactivity of social media platforms is a critical factor in influencing guests' booking intentions and overall satisfaction with the hotel experience (Harrigan et al., 2017). In the study conducted by Alalwan (2018), the significant positive impact of interactivity and informativeness on purchase intention was confirmed. Based on the results of previous studies, we anticipated a significant positive relationship between the perceived relevance of social media and the intention to visit hotels, but our findings did not support this expectation ($B = 0.076$, $p < 0.308$). On the other hand, a positive impact of informativeness ($B = 0.176$, $p < 0.048$) and interactivity ($B = 0.375$, $p < 0.000$) were confirmed. These results are consistent with those obtained in our study, thereby partially confirming the hypothesis.

Alalwan (2018) also found that habits related to social media usage positively influence purchase intention. In the context of this research, a positive impact of these variables on the intention to visit a particular hotel was observed, which significantly indicates how much reputation on social media and interaction with users influence the final decision to visit the hotel. Ho et al. (2022) found a significant positive but indirect impact of hotel image on visit intention. In this study, the positive impact of hotel image on the intention to visit a specific hotel was confirmed. It is crucial that users, through social media, can form an impression of the experience the hotel offers, whether it has adequate amenities, a good reputation, and good accessibility, and whether, after visiting the hotel's social media, they feel the need to visit the hotel. For users to form this impression and want to visit the hotel, it is important to consistently maintain social media pages and profiles to uphold the hotel's image. The results also indicate that users are willing to share their experiences with others, which is an effective way to attract new customers and a suitable form of advertising. In the context of the hotel industry, habitual social media use can enhance the perceived credibility of information and the overall attractiveness of a hotel, thereby increasing the likelihood of a booking. Consumers who habitually use social media to obtain hotel-related information are more likely to develop a strong intention to visit a hotel that has a well-managed and engaging social media presence. This is because habitual behaviors often lead to a sense of familiarity and trust, which are

critical factors in consumer decision-making. Research supports the idea that habitual use of social media is linked to stronger visit intentions. For example, Bilgihan et al. (2014) found that frequent social media interactions contribute to higher levels of engagement with hotel brands, which in turn positively affects consumers' intention to visit. Additionally, Wang and Fesenmaier (2004) suggest that the habitual use of social media for travel planning creates a deeper connection between the consumer and the brand, fostering loyalty and increasing the likelihood of choosing a particular hotel. These results are consistent with the findings of our study, which confirm a positive impact of habits of using social media ($B = 0.227$, $p < 0.000$) on visit intention.

Research has shown that a favorable image of a hotel on social media—characterized by high-quality content, positive reviews, and engaging interactions—can lead to increased visit intention. For example, studies by Ho et al. (2022) indicate that a strong and positive hotel image on social networks significantly influences potential guests' decisions, making them more inclined to book a stay. Also, Sweeney et al. (2014) highlight that a well-managed social media presence can enhance the overall image of the hotel, which in turn boosts visit intention. As expected, a positive impact of hotel image on visit intention was confirmed ($B = 0.626$, $p < 0.000$), which gave support for H_3 .

Managerial implication

From a practical standpoint, the findings of this study offer insights into the key elements that should be prioritized by marketers engaged in social media advertising. The perceived relevance of social media can be influenced by the quality and frequency of content updates, the responsiveness of the hotel to customer interactions, and the alignment of social media content with customer preferences and interests (Lee et al., 2015). By prioritizing the relevance of social media interactions, hotels can improve their online presence and effectively influence potential guests' booking decisions. Research highlights that the perceived relevance of social media content is positively associated with customer engagement and brand loyalty in the hospitality sector. For instance, effective social media strategies that deliver valuable and relevant content can lead to higher customer satisfaction and increased likelihood of choosing the hotel (Hutter et al., 2013). Social media platforms that offer relevant and engaging content can also foster trust and credibility, which are essential for attracting and retaining customers (Sweeney et al., 2014). Hotels can also leverage informative social media content to address customer concerns, provide timely updates, and enhance overall engagement with their audience. This approach not only supports effective marketing but also fosters a positive relationship between the hotel and its guests (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010).

Limitations and recommendation for future research

As a potential limitation, this study's relatively small sample size may affect the generalizability of the findings.

Future research should aim to include a larger number of respondents, particularly from various age cohorts, to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing hotel visit intentions.

Previous research suggests that high perceived relevance of social media content should ideally enhance users' attitudes towards hotels and increase their likelihood of visiting. However, our study found that perceived relevance did not exhibit the anticipated positive impact on visit intention, which indicates a potential complexity in this relationship and suggests that further research is needed to better understand these dynamics. As Wang & Lee (2020) suggested that content quality and personalization significantly enhance perceived relevance, these factors should be considered in future research. Since high levels of user engagement are associated with increased relevance and customer satisfaction (Harrigan et al., 2017), some of the forthcoming studies should be directed towards investigating these factors.

At the end, it was determined that trust in the source of information is a critical factor in determining its relevance (Erdogmus & Cicek, 2012), so analyzing how the credibility of information shared on social media platforms by hotels affects guests' perceptions can be helpful in understanding key factors that influence the intention to visit hotels.

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