Human Nature Research Publisher

Original Article

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Role of Social Media in Promoting Tourism in Pakistan

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ABSTRACT

Current research study explore role of social media in promotion of tourism in Pakistan. Pakistan has multi-colour attraction for the foreigners in term of various tourism places especially northern areas. In the world tourism is a key factor of boosting economy especially for Pakistan due to various natural places. Keeping in view, the researchers conducted survey in Islamabad and Rawalpindi and data collected from n=53 respondents that how social media can play role in promotion of tourism in Pakistan. The findings of the study revealed that almost all the respondents admitted that social media is key tool for promotion of tourism and help people to know about the areas that belong to far areas. The study concluded that in the recent age, social media is most important tool to promote tourism and attract foreigners towards Pakistan. Not only this but also through social media trust of outer world can be win by realizing that Pakistan is a safe country for the tourists.

Keywords: Social Media, Tourism Promotion, Pakistan.

Introduction

For a long time, Pakistan has been marked as a perilous terrorist state because of its geo-strategic position. Pakistan's location made it to share borders with a war-stricken Afghanistan, politically tense boundary with India, and Iran in the South. Following the incident of 9/11 and increasing tensions in the region, the tourism industry in Pakistan was deeply affected in a very undesirable way (Insider PK, 2011). Following the unfortunate attack of 9/11, Pakistan was also driven into an unwanted war against terrorism. This sent colossal hits worldwide. The travel industry in Pakistan especially the Chitral and Gilgit Baltistan districts are tourist destinations with incredible potential suffered a huge loss. For the last two decades, Pakistan has been a subject of hundreds of terrorism incidents all across the country. According to the South Asia Terrorism Portal, there were 2155 civilian casualties in 2008 and 3007 casualties in 2012 that decreased to 97 in 2019 (SATP, 2019). Due to these terrorism incidents, there was minimum tourism activity in Pakistan especially when we talk about foreign tourists. Apart from that, there was lack of international sport activities and events for a long time after the attack on the Sri Lankan cricket team in 2009 (BBC, 2019). It shows that impact of every one of these events leads to a negative picture of Pakistan everywhere in the world and tourists hesitate to visit Pakistan.

There are number of factors which affects Pakistan's image internationally. Pakistan has mostly been portrayed as a terrorist state in the mainstream western media and is considered as a safe haven for terrorists. From chartbuster movies like Iron Man to Netflix Originals like Bard of Blood Pakistan has

been portrayed as a country that is a root to all terrorism. This depiction ultimately prompts the worldwide audience's picture of an unsafe Pakistan. Apart from shows and films, the Western news media has been serving as the last nail in the coffin to make sure the international audience perceive Pakistan as nothing but an unsafe place to travel ,so, they have negative feelings about Pakistan as a country (BBC Country Rating Poll, 2011). This image of Pakistan was probably the result of biasness, lack of awareness and knowledge and due to a certain narrative shaped by the mainstream media (Fan & Shahani, 2014). Pakistan was presented as a fear-based oppressor state. However, it has been changing gradually and this study investigated that how social media is playing its role for creating awareness and changing the unfriendly and negative image of Pakistan to a tourist destination.

Tourist spots are places of interest where travelers visit usually for its intrinsic value or visit places for its normal or cultural value, historical significance and places that offer natural beauty, relaxation and entertainment. Pakistan has incredible fascination for travelers and it has all that can motivate a traveler to visit Pakistan. In Pakistan, one can discover different seasons during the entire year. Pakistan has everything from sun to the ocean from mountains to streams. The tourist attraction in Pakistan includes Swat, Kalam, Malam Jaba, Shangla, Balakot, Ayubia, Murree, Chitral, Gilgit, Naran and Kaghan valleys etc. (Khalil, 2012). Pakistan's north side is often termed as the Switzerland of Asia but at the same time the GDP development through tourism is extremely low (Khan, 2020).

Source: (*internet) Northern areas of Pakistan*

Social media are websites and applications that can be utilized to interact with each another or that help us to share views and ideas. A better explanation of it would be 'sites and applications that empower users to make and share content or to take an interest in social networking (Stevenson, 2012).Past few years have seen a boom in social media usage with an introduction of new social media apps like Snapchat, Instagram, and TikTok etc. This leads to more audience and more users all over the world. Hence, it provides more opportunities to explore things that were not on surface on the mainstream media. Social media has been an important tool in helping tourists executes their travel plans, from finding a tourist destination to planning it. According to a study, 48% tourists use Instagram to discover new travel destinations (Social Media Today, 2015). Instagram is mainly used for pictures and videos. It is a great app for travel bloggers to display their work and influence people through it. Vlogging can also been seen as a rising trend especially in the travel section and according to a Google report; travel vloggers attract 48% subscriptions on YouTube (WERSM, 2017). This shows that vloggers can influence the travel industry to generate revenue for them and for the country as well. Social media is playing a prominent role in promoting tourism in Pakistan but it still needs improvement.

This study analyses how social media can possibly develop tourism as an industry in Pakistan as it needs further exploration. The effective usage of social media demands for creating more awareness in order to access international audience and promotion among people of Pakistan.

Problem Statement

Social media has potential to develop tourism as an industry in Pakistan but is not yet fully explored. The widespread use of social media needs awareness on large scale and promotion among people of Pakistan. According to Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Report 2019, Pakistan ranks 122 out of 140 countries for its travel and tourism policy. A blogger Alishbah Khan shared her views (2020) that the tourism department in Pakistan has no presence on social media. Due to the negligence of tourism department, Pakistan is facing a lot of problems. The research investigates how social media is playing its role in creating awareness and promoting tourism in Pakistan.
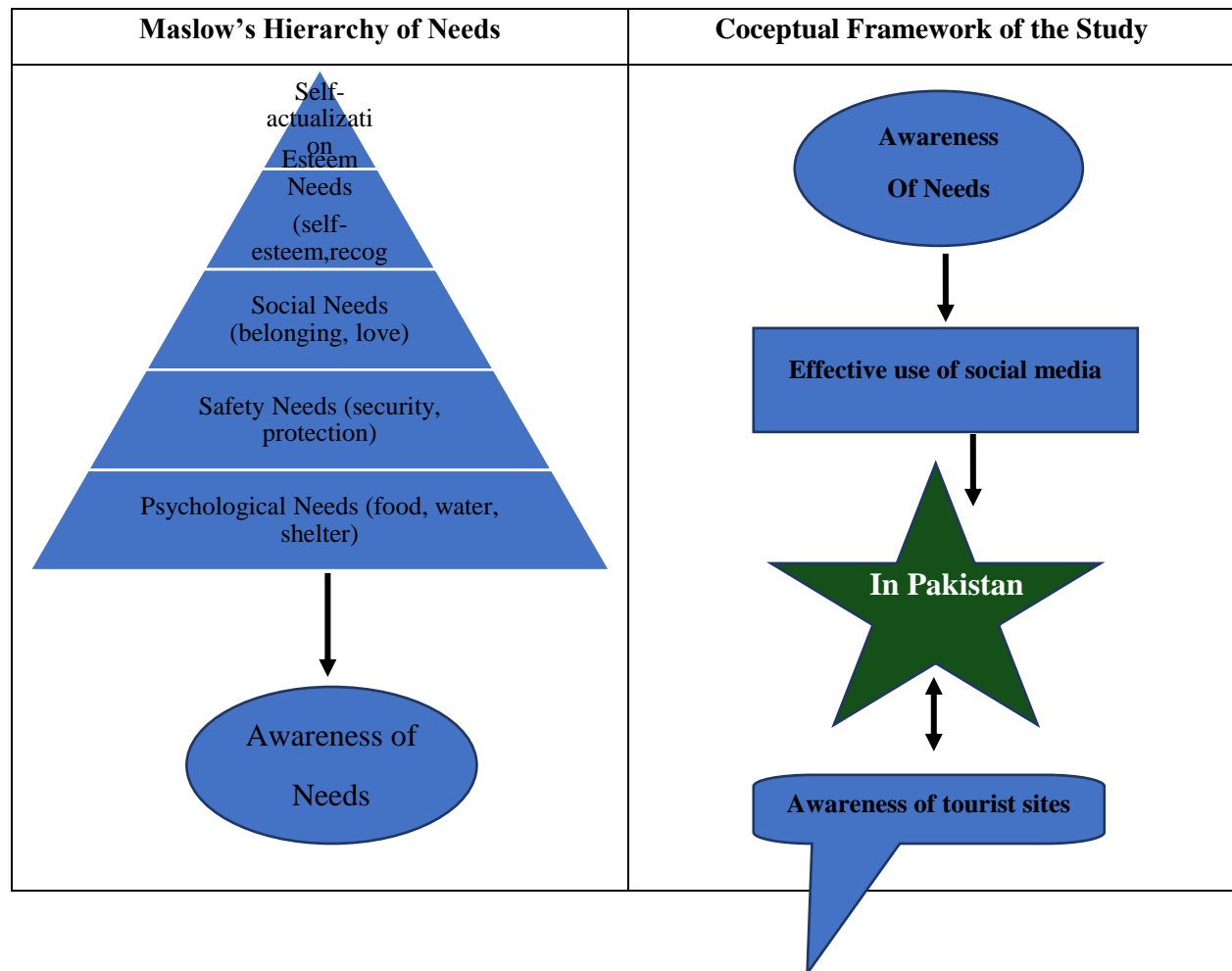
Research Question

Is social media an important source for creating awareness about tourist sites in Pakistan?

Hypothesis

Social media has helped in increasing awareness about Pakistan's tourism among masses.

Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

The research is based on Maslow Theory of the Hierarchy of Needs. The theory states that people have specific needs and are motivated by their desires to satisfy these needs. Maslow's theory helps us to understand different needs that motivate people to travel. Familiarity with the needs will help the service providers or other brands to use social media effectively. Social media in this way will play a significant role in creating awareness about tourist sites.

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs	Coceptual Framework of the Study
Self-actualization Esteem Needs (self-esteem,recog Social Needs (belonging, love) Safety Needs (security, protection) Psychological Needs (food, water, shelter) Awareness of Needs	Awareness Of Needs ↓ Effective use of social media ↓ In Pakistan ↕ Awareness of tourist sites

Literature Review

Tourism is a great source of revenue. It does not only help to build the brilliant image of the country but becomes top notch of economy. Famous destinations of world like Dubai, London, Paris, New York, Sydney and Mumbai are giving mind blowing revenue to their governments. Millions of tourists visit these places and this leads to sensational revenue and rise in economy. Now, this is an era of digital media and we are living in that era where information is flowing to millions within few hours. Social media has changed the dynamics of business and to make tourism as an industry, social media has given tremendous boost.

Samson (2017) Social media is contemporary and this is supporting masses to get information before visiting the destination. Giants like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and YouTube are giving so many options to tourists to check the places before visiting them. Tourists can check whether they can go to those places, how's the political situation is there? They can find more interesting places and this can save plenty of time for them. The social media also provides the feedback to those tourists who want to go certain places. This feedback is generated by those who have been already at one spot. The information about famous touring places is present in form of videos, tourism blogs, pictures, tweets and Instagram blogging. The main advantage of social media is that it is time saving and it helps to generate large revenue for the state.

Shaista (2019) Tourism is one of the leading brands of economy in modern world. Many countries across the world are generating billions of revenues through tourism. Pakistan is one of the iconic countries of the world when it comes to tourism. For tourists around the globe, the things which attract the tourists are mountains, snow, greenery, historical places and diversity and all these ingredients are available in Pakistan. The misfortune for the Pakistan was entire country remained in the influence of the terrorism and there was no suitable image of the country. As social media is on peak in Pakistan, this is the great time to develop permanent touring destinations which attract the local tourists as well as international tourists. People on different social media platforms put their experiences about these places and one can get ideas before visiting them.

This is one of the best advantages of the social media. As this new government of PTI has arrived in Pakistan, there main focus was to give boost to tourism and focus on the tourist sites. Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government made touring ministry and focused on the northern side of the province to attract the tourists. It is fantastic science, if we take the example of Kartarpur corridor; it did not only give religious opportunities but also helping government to generate the revenue in great way.

Wei Han (2018) Tourism throughout the world has one phenomenon that tourists, who want to visit the certain places, want healthy environment sites. This leads to sustainable development programs of environment which is great for promotion of touring places. With the proliferation of internet and digital media, it is now the responsibility of social media to guide the aspiring tourists. These social media channels have great viewership and traffic. User-granted content (UGC) has more potential to promote sustainable tourism programs.

Tourism works on basic economic techniques; people visit different places for chilling. They buy food, get transport, do hoteling, for this they pay money. This leads to eventual cycle, which touches the local market and generates revenues.

Muhamamad Irshad Arshad (2018) Travel and living are such a terrific hobby for so millions of the people around the world. It supports the local business and country like Pakistan which has so many places of every genre, it's a treat for tourists to come and enjoy. There are few challenges which tourism in Pakistan facing, which are hurdle to make it official industry for the revenue. Issues like lack of federal body for tourism at government level, media coverage, safety of the tourist, and poor coordination among departments, lack of private sector, weak touring structure and negative image. However, after the arrival

of the digital media, the tourism industry in Pakistan is proliferating and it is creating some positive impact.

Digital media is quick and it is vibrant, so it catches the audience quickly than traditional media. So, for next one decade, government should make development plans about tourism and its promotion through social media, so masses can come to sites and our economy remains stable.

Research Methodology

The purpose of this section is to explain the research methodology in detail that is used for the study. In the research, quantitative method was adopted. The target population for data collection was specified to the people of Islamabad and Rawalpindi. The sample frame of the study included audience members who are the users of social media in Islamabad and Rawalpindi.

Questionnaires are reliable method to collect data from multiple respondents in a systematic way. In this research, online survey was used for primary data collection due to COVID-19 pandemic. Ten close ended questions were asked from the respondents. Platforms of WhatsApp and Email were used to provide the link of survey to the respondents. The sample size of the research comprised of 53 respondents. Type of non-probability sampling i.e., convenient sampling was used for data collection. Due to Covid-19 pandemic this technique found easy for the researchers to reach the desired sample.

Data Collection

Data of this research was converted into statistical form generated automatically on Google Forms. Researchers used the Likert scale questions. The scale is comprised of 5 options that range from strongly agree to strongly disagree.

Data Analysis

After data collection through surveys, data is analyzed. Likert scale is adopted in survey. In surveys, respondents are asked to answer ten questions. The survey is designed on the basis of three indicators. The indicators are as follows: information related to tourist sites, public experience and marketing of tourist sites. Out of ten questions, four are related to information about tourist sites, four are related to marketing of tourist sites and two questions are related to public experience. To get the results in statistical form, the data is codified by using SPSS. Strongly agree is codified as 1, Agree as 2, Strongly Disagree as 3, Disagree as 4 and Neutral as 5. After the coding, different tests are conducted like Cronbach alpha, cross tabulation, chi-square, probability plot and histograms.

Cronbach alpha

Cronbach alpha (α) is a test in SPSS used to assess the reliability or internal consistency of a survey. The coefficient of reliability (alpha) ranges from 0 to 1. If all of the scale items are independent from each other i.e. are not correlated then alpha becomes equal to zero. If the scale items are correlated then value of alpha approaches 1. Ideally, value of alpha should be higher than 0.6 in the social sciences but 0.5 is also acceptable.

Reliability Analysis

In order to check the reliability of the survey, Cronbach alpha was calculated. Ideally, Cronbach alpha should be greater than 0.6 but 0.5 is also acceptable in social sciences. My value is 0.763 as shown in the table 1. According to the ideal value, it can be seen that 0.763 is a good value. The result of the reliability test ensures that the test items of the survey are linked to each other and are coherent.

Table 1: *Reliability Statistics*

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
.763	.787	10

Cross Tabulation

Cross tabulation is used to analyze the relationship between two or more variables. It summarizes the categorical data to create a contingency table.

Relationship analysis

Cross tabulation test is used to analyze the relationship of role of social media in creating awareness about Pakistan's tourism. The results show that mostly people agree to the role of social media in creating awareness about tourist sites. Mostly people agree that they modify their plans after visiting social media and that they recommend social media platforms to others for travelling as presented in the tables 2 and 3 respectively.
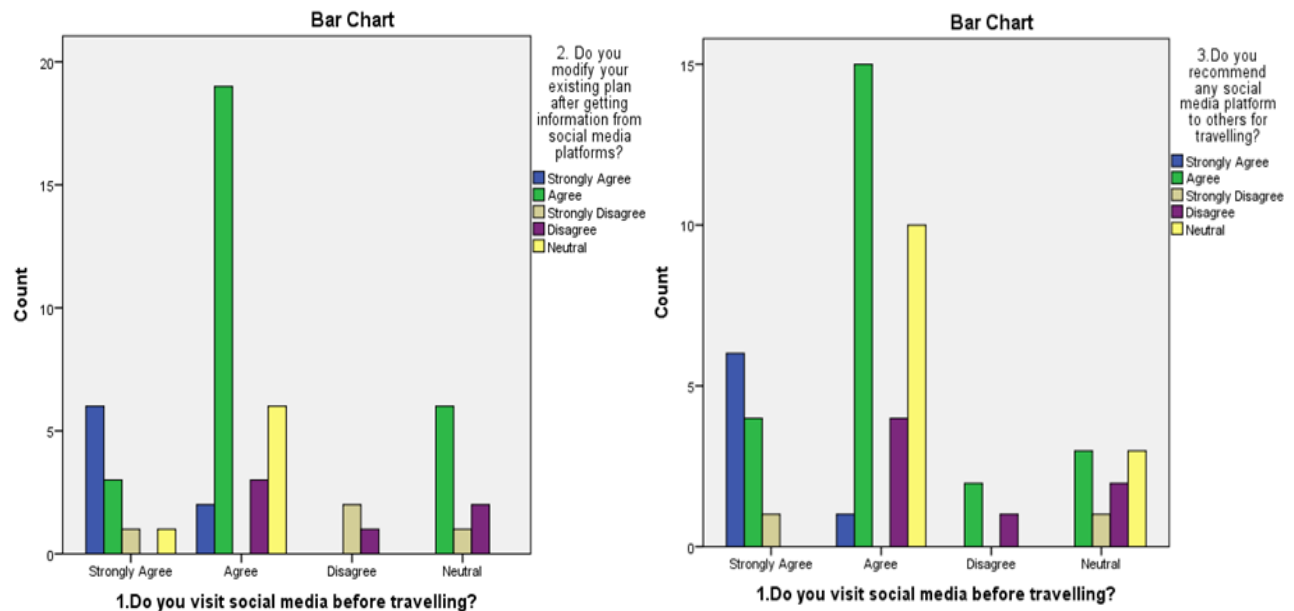
Chi-square

Chi-square is a test that represents the goodness of fit of the model. Chi-square value should be higher than 0.05. The values show a strong and significant relationship between the variables i.e. social media and awareness related to tourist sites. The results clearly ensure the rejection of null hypothesis that means alternative hypothesis is accepted.

Table : *Chi-Square Tests*

	Value	Df	Asymp. Sig (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	14.620a	16	.553
Pearson Chi-Square	24.318a	16	.830

Probability Plots (P-plots)

It is a graph which shows how closely the data sets are located. P-plot determines to what extent your data is normally distributed. Majority of the graph show that the data is normally distributed and follows a

pattern (in figure 1). However, some of the graphs also show that they are not following a certain pattern (in figure 2).

Figure 1: Normal P-P Plot of 5. Do you think that social media has the potential to market tourist sites of Pakistan effectively?
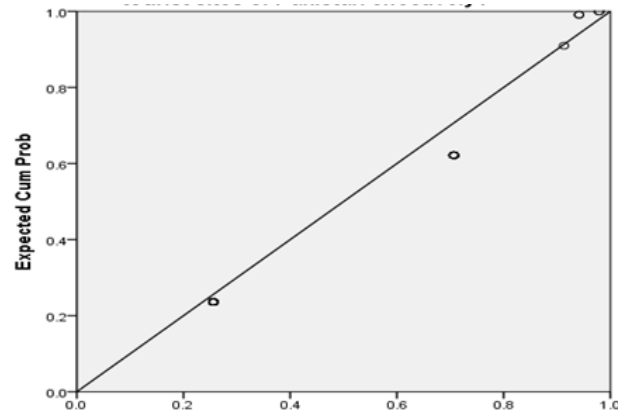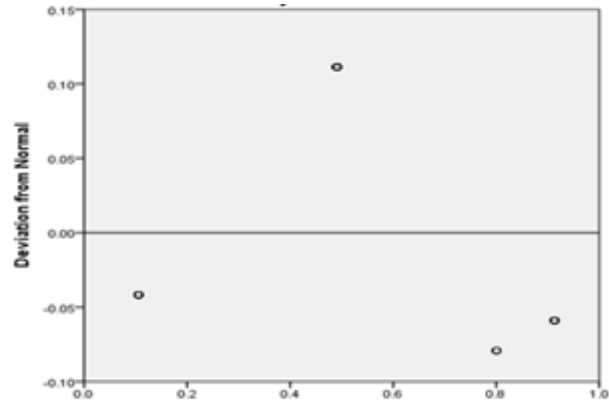
Figure 2: Detrended Normal P-P Plot of 1-Do you visit social media before travelling?

Histogram

Histogram is a graph that shows the underlying frequency distribution of a set of continuous data. It allows inspection of data for its underlying distribution for example normal distribution. It help us to understand whether the data is skewed or not. Majority of the graphs follow a pattern (in figure 3). However, some graphs show that the data is skewed and they do not follow a pattern (in figure 4).

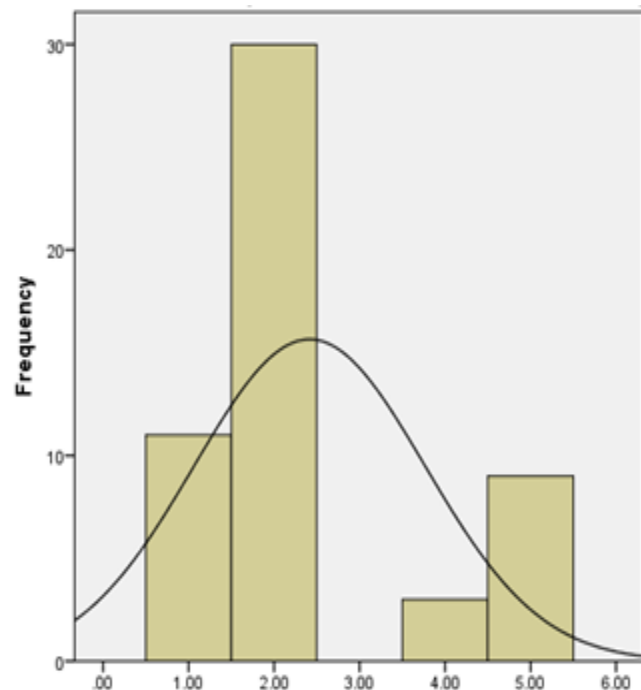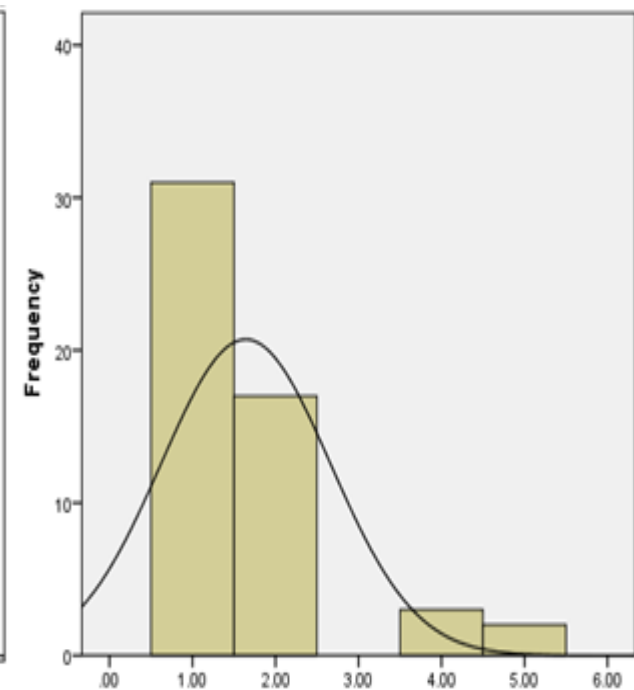Figure 3: Do you visit social media before travelling?

Figure 4: Do you think social marketing of tourist sites has the potential to attract international audience?

Conclusion

Social media is already an important part of our life. It has influenced our personalities and also changed our living patterns. It is evident from the results that social media has a significant role in creating awareness about Pakistan's tourism among people. Social media is becoming popular day by day as the source of information related to travelling and tourist resorts. People love to share their travelling experiences on social media, consequently, people come to know about the new tourist destinations. In this way, social media is playing an effective role in increasing awareness and promoting tourism in Pakistan.

Recommendations

Pakistan has the potential to attract international audience. In Pakistan, there are various historical places, religious places and areas with natural scenic beauty. Unfortunately, Pakistan is framed as a terrorist state in the past. On the other side, past governments were least concerned in the tourism sector. All these factors contributed towards the negative image of Pakistan. Tourism industry can generate revenues for our country. The PTI government is working on developing tourism as an industry in Pakistan but we still need to do a lot of work in this sector. Social media is an efficient way to market our resorts. Government needs to use this medium in a constructive manner. As a community, we also need to play our role. Moreover, we should encourage our students to conduct research on such topics. This will definitely help to promote tourism in Pakistan. We need to highlight the issues and proposed solutions of the problems in order to help our policy-makers.

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