

The Influence of Social Media on Fostering Responsible Tourism

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ABSTRACT

Social media platforms have, in fact, revolutionized the ways of communication and practices of social interaction; this goes beyond the personal into a larger domain where responsible tourism has become one concern among many others. Indeed, these digital platforms are instrumental and effective for both promotion and improvement of responsible tourism all over the globe, either becoming a source of much-needed information-pulling and experience-sharing between people or providing a space in which audiences from varied backgrounds or cultures could connect. Furthermore, through this feature, responsible tourism may be emotionally strengthened through the dissemination of best practices and innovative ideas in the field. Thus, the present study attempts to address the expository characteristics of social media platforms, beyond which it incorporates preliminary discussions into responsible tourism. Additionally, it scrutinizes the practicalities and hurdles associated with integrating social media into responsible as well as, sustainable tourism initiatives.

1. Introduction

The twenty-first century is known for having the history of the very quickest and unprocessed technological advancements in many aspects of everyday life, including the aspect of communications. The world has observed a form of social interaction among humans in a virtual electronic space, reducing distances between people, eliminating geographical boundaries, and amalgamating diverse cultures. This form of interaction has evolved into a dynamic and kinetic entity, initially constituting a narrow and limited virtual community but expanding and proliferating with the advancement of technology. Consequently, it has fostered a type of communication and interaction among individuals, groups, institutions, and other stakeholders, providing them with a rapid and efficient electronic virtual platform for disseminating information and fostering communication without spatial or temporal constraints. This form of interpersonal communication has been termed as social networking sites. Social networking sites have been instrumental in changing the way we interact with the world around us, with their impact extending to various fields, including tourism. Thanks to these digital platforms, travellers have gained a means to communicate, exchange experiences, and knowledge, thereby shaping travel experiences in a manner conducive to promoting responsible tourism. This is the focal point of our research, as we seek to address the following question:

-In what ways do social media platforms contribute to the promotion and development of responsible tourism?

-This will be explored by addressing the following aspects:

1- Exploring the Dynamics of Social Networking Platforms

2- Initiating the Discourse on Responsible Tourism

3- Charting Paths: Leveraging Social Networking Platforms for Responsible Tourism **Social Networking**

2. . Investigating the mechanisms of Social Networking Platforms:

The internet has precipitated a rapid evolution in how individuals and user groups interact with the outputs of this network, providing them with a virtual space for exchanging information, opinions, and ideas, particularly

following the emergence of social networking sites and their widespread adoption by individuals. Social networking is considered one of the most frequently visited sites by users of this network due to the unique characteristics and capabilities that distinguish it from other electronic platforms.

2.1 Examining the Twofold Nature of Sites:

Several definitions of social networking sites have been proposed, highlighting a range of differences stemming from the dual perspective of considering these networks as technological platforms due to their technological evolution, software, and diverse applications on one hand, and as social mediums that emphasize the roles and services they provide to users for communication on the other hand. We will attempt to incorporate some of these definitions to delineate their concept as follows:

1. "A system of electronic sites allowing subscribers to create their own site and subsequently link it through an electronic social system with other members sharing similar interests and hobbies" (Zaheer, 2003).
2. "Social networking sites comprising members from various countries worldwide, aiming to connect and acquaint them based on specialization, location, and shared objectives" (Ray Eldon & Gibbon, 2009, p. 12).
3. Social networking sites are identified as a group of websites on the internet that emerged with the second generation of the web (Web 2.0), facilitating communication between individuals in a virtual structure uniting them by common interests or affiliations (country, school, university, company, etc.), where communication occurs through messaging or perusal of profiles, learning about their news and information they make available for display, serving as an effective means of social interaction among individuals, whether they are friends known in real life or acquaintances identified through virtual contexts (McSwete, 2009, pp. 95-96).
4. "They are electronic social sites on the internet, constituting the foundational pillar of new or alternative media enabling individuals and groups to communicate through this virtual space" (Abbas Mustafa Sadek, 2008, p. 218).
5. The definition proposed by Allison and Beed is widely recognized among researchers, stating that social networking sites are "a category of sites offering web-based services enabling individuals to build a public profile available or semi-available to the public within a specified system. These sites also allow for building a network of relationships and viewing the network of others' relationships (friends list)" (El Sadik El Hammami, 2012).

Through the foregoing, some of these definitions have predominantly emphasized the technical aspect of these social electronic networks as distinguished components of the "internet" in recent times, enabling users to create and organize personal profiles, as well as facilitating communication with others, emphasizing the communicative dimension linking users with diverse relationships. Meanwhile, other definitions have highlighted and delved into the social and interactive aspects specific to social electronic networks, including:

1. Social electronic networks are defined as: "An electronic social composition crafted from individuals, groups, or institutions, with each constitutive part named a 'node,' whereby these nodes are connected through various patterns of social relationships, fostering a particular team spirit, organizational affiliation, or national identity within this realm, wherein these relationships may extend deeper into social status, beliefs, or user affiliations" (Wolton, 2010).
2. They can also be defined as "a collective of activities, practices, and behaviors conducted by millions of internet users worldwide to exchange information, knowledge, experiences, and opinions" (Eldon & Gibbon, 2009, p. 11).
3. They are also recognized as interactive social networks enabling user communication at any time and from any location worldwide, emerging on the internet years ago, and enabling visual and auditory communication and exchange of images and other capabilities that reinforce social relationships among users (Al-Dulaimi, 2011, p. 183).

Through all these definitions, social networking sites can be defined as: "Electronic social networks utilized by individuals, groups, or specific entities in society, known as users, facilitating the transfer of ideas, opinions, experiences, exchange of information and knowledge among them. They enable users to share files, images, and exchange video clips, as well as create personal pages and engage in instant conversations and dialogues, sending messages, thereby fostering continuous and constant interaction and communication, forming social relationships among them."

2.2 The Features of social networking sites:

Social networking sites share fundamental characteristics, including:

1. **Profile Pages:** Through profile pages, individuals can be identified by name, basic information such as gender, date of birth, interests, personal photos, among other details. The profile serves as the gateway to an individual's world, allowing others to view recent activity, identify friends, and access new photos, among other activities.
2. **Participation:** Social networking sites encourage contributions and feedback from interested individuals, blurring the line between media and audience.
3. **Openness:** Most social media platforms offer open services for feedback, sharing, creation, and modification of pages, encouraging voting, comments, information exchange, with rare barriers to accessing and benefiting from content.
4. **Conversation:** Social networking sites and social media differ from traditional media by allowing two-way conversation, enabling engagement with events, news, or presented information.
5. **Friends/Connections:** Represent individuals known for a specific purpose, with social networking sites labelling them as "friends" for those added to the friends list, while some professional networking sites use terms like "connections" for those added to the list.
6. **Messaging:** This feature allows for direct messaging to individuals, whether they are on the friends list or not.
7. **Photo Albums:** Social networks allow users to create infinite albums and upload hundreds of photos, sharing them with friends for viewing and commenting.
8. **Community:** Social media allows local communities to quickly form their own sites and communicate effectively, connecting these communities worldwide around shared interests or concerns, transforming the world into a closely-knit electronic community.
9. **Groups:** Many social networking sites enable the creation of interest groups with specific goals, offering a platform akin to a mini discussion forum and photo album, facilitating meeting coordination through invitations to group members
10. **Connectivity:** Social networking sites are characterized by interconnected social networks, facilitated by links provided on site pages, connecting users to other social networking sites, simplifying and speeding up the transfer of information.
11. **Pages:** Introduced by Facebook, this concept has been effectively commercialized, enabling targeted advertising campaigns, allowing businesses or event organizers to direct their pages and display them to a defined group of users, with Facebook deducting a fee for each click on the advertisement. Pages involve creating a page with information about a product, personality, or event, with users subsequently browsing those pages through specific divisions. If interested, they add them to their personal profiles.

There are other features that distinguish social networking sites:

1. **Inclusivity:** Social networks eliminate geographical and spatial barriers, abolishing international boundaries, enabling individuals in the East to communicate with those in the West effortlessly.
2. **Interactivity:** Individuals are both receivers and transmitters in social networking sites, eradicating the passive negativity inherent in traditional media and providing space for active participation from viewers.
3. **Versatility:** Social networking sites are easy and flexible to use, utilized by students for education, scholars for disseminating knowledge, writers for engaging with readers, and community members for communication.
4. **User-Friendliness:** In addition to using letters and simple language, social networks employ symbols and images that facilitate conveying ideas and interacting with others.
5. **Economical in effort, time, and money:** Given the free subscription and registration, everyone can have a space on the network for social interaction, not limited to the wealthy or to certain groups over others.

3. Initiating the Discourse on Responsible Tourism:

Despite achieving high rates in development and tourism projects, communities sometimes face various harmful effects imposed by different social, cultural, and consumptive factors. For example, issues such as wearing clothing that contradicts the customs and traditions of the local community, excessive water consumption in tourist areas suffering from water scarcity, or matters related to littering and waste disposal, etc. This has led to the emergence of responsible tourism, which emphasizes the importance of respecting human rights and the environment, and aims to achieve cultural, social, and economic well-being and equality for all people.

3.1 Sustainable Travel: Defining the Concept of Responsible Tourism:

The term "Responsible Tourism" was first defined in Cape Town in 2002 during the World Summit on Sustainable Development. This definition, stemming from the Cape Town Declaration, gained wide acceptance and was endorsed by the global travel market on the occasion of World Responsible Tourism Day. Responsible Tourism can be defined as: "providing better places for people to live in and better places for people to visit." It requires operators, hoteliers, governments, local residents, and tourists to take responsibility and implement measures to make tourism more sustainable.

Moreover, the term "Responsible Tourism" emerged in textual form in the early 1990s in Smith's (1990) report on the World Tourism Organization's colloquium for 1989 on alternative tourism in Tamanrasset, Algeria. Forty tourism scholars, along with a similar number of Algerian representatives, presented papers aimed at defining the role and activities of alternative tourism in 13 countries. Alternative tourism was viewed as socially and environmentally responsible. It was decided that "Responsible Tourism" was the preferred term, being less ambiguous, and the forms of tourism that respect the natural, material, and cultural environment of the host community, in addition to respecting their interests, were agreed upon.

Husbands and Harrison (1996), in their work on "Applications of Responsible Tourism," describe Responsible Tourism as not referring to a brand or any specific type of tourism but encompassing a framework and set of practices that delineate a specific path between the ambiguity of ecological tourism activity and the known negative externalities associated with traditional mass tourism. The fundamental point concerning Responsible Tourism is that tourism itself can be practiced in ways that minimize and mitigate its evident negatives

3.2 Benefits of Responsible Tourism:

The Cape Town Declaration defines responsible tourism as encompassing a variety of forms and distinguishing itself within the travel and tourism industry by:

1. Mitigating negative economic, environmental, and social impacts.
2. Generating greater economic benefits for local residents, enhancing the well-being of host communities, improving working conditions, and fostering integration into the industry.
3. Involving local residents in decisions that affect and change their lives.
4. Making positive contributions to the preservation of natural and cultural heritage, and maintaining diversity worldwide.
5. Providing enjoyable experiences for tourists by fostering fruitful relationships with local residents, along with a greater understanding of local cultural, social, and environmental issues.
6. Providing facilities for people with disabilities and those in need.
7. Demonstrating cultural transparency, fostering respect between tourists and hosts, and instilling pride and confidence within the local environment.
8. Encompassing the four most important orientations, which enhance the status of local communities, support cultures, and safeguard the environment, thus mitigating negative impacts in the aforementioned areas.
9. Benefiting all stakeholders involved in responsible tourism activities.

3.3 Responsible Tourism and Sustainable Tourism: Partners in Shaping the Future of Travel:

Responsible tourism is not merely a synonym for sustainable tourism. It engages with agreed-upon concepts of sustainable tourism and operationalizes them, transcending the boundaries of sustainable tourism, as its work is continuous. Responsible tourism does not introduce anything new; according to some authors, it does not offer a new alternative to other forms of tourism or present a new approach to applying the principles of sustainable tourism.

Consequently, responsible tourism relies on sustainable strategies and policies and supports the adoption of appropriate behaviours, indicating ongoing interactions. In line with Goodwin's concept of "response-ability," supported by ethical and environmental tourism awareness, responsible tourism is described as tourism centered on sustainable development principles. These principles are described as the three pillars, which include economic demand stability, social-cultural objectives, and environmental goals, enabling tourism operators to remain competitive in the long term.

Some thinkers have sought to add a fourth pillar representing political sustainability. However, it was not feasible to adopt these political dimensions as a fourth pillar because unlike the aforementioned economic, social-cultural, and environmental dimensions directly linked to tourism industry impacts, political dimensions were not directly

related to tourism sustainability issues. Therefore, the inclusion of political dimensions within the issue of tourism sustainability was not feasible.

Responsible tourism intersects with sustainable tourism at several key points, forming what is referred to as the "three pillars": the socio-cultural pillar, the environmental pillar, and the economic pillar. These pillars are indispensable and constitute the essence of responsible tourism, which preserves the environment, local community culture, and achieves economic prosperity. These pillars are based on several requirements related to tourism sustainability and form the spirit and methodology of responsible tourism, including environmental awareness, education, collaboration, ethics, and stakeholder participation, ultimately leading to "tourist satisfaction," one of the primary goals pursued by sustainable tourism. All of the aforementioned pillars and requirements fall under what is termed "tourism responsibilities" and involve the implementation of numerous responsible tourism policies involving various stakeholders.

3.4 Tourism Professions and Responsible Tourism:

One of the most important duties and responsibilities imposed by the tourism profession is those encompassed by the role of tour guiding. Through this vital function within the tourism sector, the employment and realization of ethical principles associated with both responsible and sustainable tourism are manifested. This involves achieving high levels of performance quality by respecting humans, the environment, and addressing cultural and ethical factors from the perspective of tour guides in their interactions with tourists.

Therefore, the tour guide must sense the magnitude of responsibility inherent in their work because they are the individuals most in contact and interaction with tourists. They guide and direct them directly, hence they should perceive responsibility as an innate quality, as it is a trait that humans derive from their nature before acquiring it from external sources. Thus, responsibility comes in three forms:

1. Religious responsibility
2. Social responsibility
3. Ethical responsibility

Herein lies the imperative for the tour guide to recognize the enormity of their responsibility in their role as tour guides. Before being responsible for the tourist group, they are accountable for what they say, do, guide towards, and hence, they bear the responsibility when performing the essential duties of any profession. The tour guide must commit to the entrusted burdens to the best of their abilities, and this commitment will necessitate specific behaviours and actions towards the tourist group under their guidance. They must provide information about tourist attractions, the history of the area or country with sincerity and honesty, and strive to foster genuine and healthy relationships.

Just as the tour guide's ethics include their sense of tourism responsibility towards individuals, they are also responsible for their homeland. This responsibility falls on them through what they convey of a positive and bright image, as they are also responsible for portraying a good image of their country by conveying its values, customs, traditions, heritage, and history, all of which are tied to their personal conduct and direct interaction with members of the tourist group. Some tour guides adhere to work ethics, while others disregard them. However, it is in the interest of the General Authority for Tourism to ensure that all adhere to them based on the charter that delineates the ethics of the tour guiding profession from the perspective of the General Authority for Tourism, making it binding for all its practitioners and ensuring that there are deterrent penalties for any violations thereof (Bint Mohammed, 2012).

4. Mapping the Way: Utilizing Social Networking Platforms for Responsible Tourism:

Social media platforms play a significant role in promoting responsible tourism by enabling travellers to exchange experiences and knowledge. In addition, these platforms contribute to raising awareness about environmental conservation issues and local culture, fostering dialogue and interaction between travellers and local communities. This will be further elaborated on in the following sections.

4.1 Key Social Media Platforms:

4.1.1 Facebook:

Facebook is a social networking site that allows both individuals and entities, such as companies, to present themselves or enhance their status by communicating with others within the scope of the site. It facilitates various forms of interaction and establishes connections with others.

Founded by Mark Zuckerberg in 2004 to facilitate communication among students at Harvard University, the site quickly gained popularity among students at other universities in the United States, Britain, and Canada. Over time, it evolved from a platform for self-expression and personal photos into a specialized social networking site,

overseen by Facebook Inc., which became valued in the billions by 2008 due to its 21 million subscribers that year, surpassing any other social networking site to become the world's foremost platform.

The site transitioned from merely showcasing personal photos and communicating with friends and family to becoming a channel for electronic community interaction, a platform for presenting fundamental ideas, and a crucial marketing communication channel adopted by thousands of companies to engage with their audience (Al-Rifai, Amer, & Deep, 2012).

And among the most important features of Facebook are the following:

1. **Profile:** Upon subscribing to the website, you are required to create a personal profile containing your personal information, photos, favorite activities, and other relevant details to facilitate access by others or even by companies.
2. **Add Friend:** Users can add any friend or search for any individual on Facebook using their email address.
3. **Group Creation:** Through this feature, users can create an online community centered around a specific issue. Users can make membership exclusive to family and friends or open to anyone interested in the topic (Fadlallah, 2012).
4. **Wall:** It is a dedicated space on the profile page of any user, allowing friends to send various messages to that user (Ghassan & Al-Muqaddami, 2012).
5. **Pokes:** Through this feature, users can send virtual pokes to draw attention to each other, which is a notification that alerts the user that someone is greeting them.
6. **Photos:** This feature enables users to upload albums and photos from personal devices to the website and display them.
7. **Status:** It allows users to inform their friends about their whereabouts and current activities.
6. **News Feed:** It highlights certain data, such as changes in the profile, upcoming events, and birthdays of the user's friends.

4.1.2 YouTube:

YouTube is an online platform that supports the uploading, downloading, and sharing of videos in general and for free. It allows for the gradual uploading and viewing of short films, from public videos that anyone can watch to private videos that only a specific group can view. The website was founded in February 2005 by three employees of PayPal, an American "Chad Hurley," a Taiwanese "Steve Chen," and a Bangladeshi "Jawed Karim," in California. The site uses Adobe Flash technology to display animated clips. Its content varies from movie clips, television, music clips, and amateur-produced videos, among others. Today, YouTube has become a primary platform for artists, politicians, and amateurs alike to showcase their films, songs, or products to the public for free.

Furthermore, YouTube has evolved to be used by universities and governments to broadcast awareness programs or electronic lessons through it. YouTube is also considered one of the greatest innovations of social networking sites due to its multiple features (Nuriman, 2012).

We note the following key features:

1. **Public and Free:** Users can upload and download films of their choice, whether educational or promotional, free of charge.
2. **Film Upload Support:** The website provides a free server with unlimited space for uploading films of all types (MP4, WMV, FLV, AV1, etc.) or songs (MP3) and converting them into small-sized Flash films.
3. **User-Friendly:** The website is user-friendly for uploading and downloading films compared to other websites, providing supportive tools for this purpose.
4. **Easy Search:** The website offers its own search engine, allowing users to search for film titles or events and then watch them by simply clicking on the film link.
5. **Supervision and Live Streaming Feature:** The website allows users to specify who can view the film. By clicking on the film link, users can watch it from any device that supports streaming technology, a feature that has enabled many broadcasting stations and news channels to broadcast their programs live, considered a breakthrough in media development and live streaming technologies.

4.1.3 X:

Formerly known as Twitter, X is a website that offers a microblogging service, allowing users to send tweets about their status, limited to a maximum of 140 characters per message, directly through sending a short text message (SMS) or through the X website, instant messaging applications, or the apps provided by developers.

The website appeared in early 2006 as a research development project conducted by the American company Obvious in San Francisco. Later, the company officially launched it to users in general in October 2006. After that, the website began to spread as a new service in 2007 in terms of providing microblogging. Today, X is considered a reliable source for personal statements, whether issued by politicians, actors, journalists, or community leaders in both Western and Arab societies alike (Hussein, 2014).

X has also become part of various media systems, where users can receive information streams from all media outlets. It represents a real-time information network supported by people from around the world, enabling the sharing and discovery of what is happening now. The site poses the question on its interface: "What's happening now?" and makes the answer instantly available to millions. It also has several other features and advantages, including:

- Easy and Fast: By simply entering your email, registering your name, username, and password, you become a member of the site.
- Effective Tool for Communicating with the World: X posts can be easily sent from laptops or mobile phones, facilitating communication with a large group of friends, acquaintances, or followers on the site in moments (Bouamar).

4.1.4 LinkedIn:

LinkedIn is a social network specialized in work and commerce, encompassing many professionals from various fields who share common interests. It emerged in 2003 to the public in California. LinkedIn is a professional social network that, while other social networks like Facebook and MySpace focus on personal and social relationships, allows professionals to establish and maintain relationships in the scientific field. It also promotes their services and technical and professional skills. Despite its inception in 2002, it has become one of the most important professional social networks today. Among the features of this site:

1. Users can upload photos and view other users' profiles and photos.
2. Users can identify the number of people searching for them.
3. Employers can list job openings and search for potential candidates.
4. Stay connected with your professional field within this sector.
5. Strengthen professional careers and enhance online professional presence.
6. Allows the inclusion of various applications and the display of books that can be purchased online.
7. The feature of creating groups allows anyone to form a team of professionals or engage in cultures around jobs, in addition to the feature of "blocking members," which allows users to block others from following their personal pages and viewing them.

4.1.5 Flickr.com:

Flickr.com is a social networking site for exchanging photos and videos online. The site is widely used for sharing personal photos among friends, as well as by experts or enthusiasts who want to share the photos they have taken with the world. Flickr was developed in February 2004 by Ludi Corp after the company founded a massive online multiplayer game and then abandoned it. However, the Flickr project remained in place, eventually becoming the largest photo-sharing database today. In March 2005, Yahoo acquired Ludi Corp and Flickr. This site allows users to organize the photos in their Flickr accounts, allowing users to edit keywords and descriptions of photos and organize or add photos to public groups and add photos to the world map. Flickr also provides a service to save photos generally for visitors when any site visitor can view or download the photos, only available to the account owner or those allowed to view them when uploading the photos.

4.1 Statistics of Social Media Utilization:

The time spent by social media users varies significantly across countries, with this duration increasing significantly in developing nations. For example, users in the Philippines spend 3 hours and 52 minutes on social media channels, while in Kenya it's 3 hours and 47 minutes, in Morocco it's 3 hours and 34 minutes, and in Turkey it's 3 hours and 3

minutes. Meanwhile, citizens in Russia spend 2 hours and 16 minutes, in France it's 1 hour and 47 minutes, in Germany it's 1 hour and 38 minutes, in South Korea it's 1 hour and 16 minutes, and finally, in Japan, it's only 47 minutes. This may be attributed to citizens spending more time at work in advanced countries compared to their counterparts in developing and less developed countries.

Statistics have shown that in advanced countries like the United States, women use social media more than men, with women representing 53% compared to 47% for men. In the UK, women represent 51% compared to 49% for men. However, women's participation in North Africa remains low, where women represent 41% of social media users compared to 59% for men. In West Africa, 38% are women compared to 62% men, and in South Asia, only 28% are women compared to 72% men. Women's lesser usage of social media in developing countries indicates a significant digital divide, necessitating these countries to promote digital literacy to bridge the gap so that women and girls do not find themselves lagging behind in keeping up with the demands of this era. 75.5% of social media platform users are over the age of 13. The largest age group of social media users is between 25 to 34 years old. The average number of social media platforms used per month is approximately 7.4.

Figure 1: Statistics on Social Media Platforms



Source: Global and Local Social Media Trends and Their Impact on National Security. Retrieved from: <https://draya-eg.or> Accessed on 30/01/2023.

Among active users of social media, their proportion in North Africa is 56% of the total population, while in West Africa it is 16%, and in Central Africa it is 9%. In Western Europe, it is 83%, Southern Europe 76%, Central Asia 33%, South Asia 34%, and in North America 78%.

The United Arab Emirates topped the list of countries with the highest usage of social media platforms, with a percentage of users reaching around 123.4% of the total population. It was followed by South Korea with 90.8%, Taiwan with 88.5%, the United Kingdom with 84.6%, Turkey with 82.4%, and the United States with 77.3%. Meanwhile, in Kenya, it reached 23.3%, and in Nigeria, 15.8%.

The most widely used social media platforms worldwide are ranked as follows:

1. Facebook: Leading the pack with 2,936 million visitors.
2. YouTube: Following closely with 2,476 million users.
3. WhatsApp: Third with 2 billion users.
4. Instagram: Fourth with 1,440 million users.
5. WeChat: Fifth with 1,288 million users.
6. TikTok: Sixth with 1,023 million users.
7. Facebook Messenger: Seventh with 1 billion users.
8. Telegram: Eighth with 700 million users.
9. Snapchat: Ninth with 617 million users.
10. Douyin: Tenth with 613 million users.

Experts confirm that the increase in the popularity of social media platforms is attributed to the widespread use of mobile phones to access their preferred social media platforms, as internet users with smartphones comprise approximately 96% of the total population in the age group of 16 to 64 years old.

4.3 The Fundamental Drivers for the Use of Social Media Platforms:

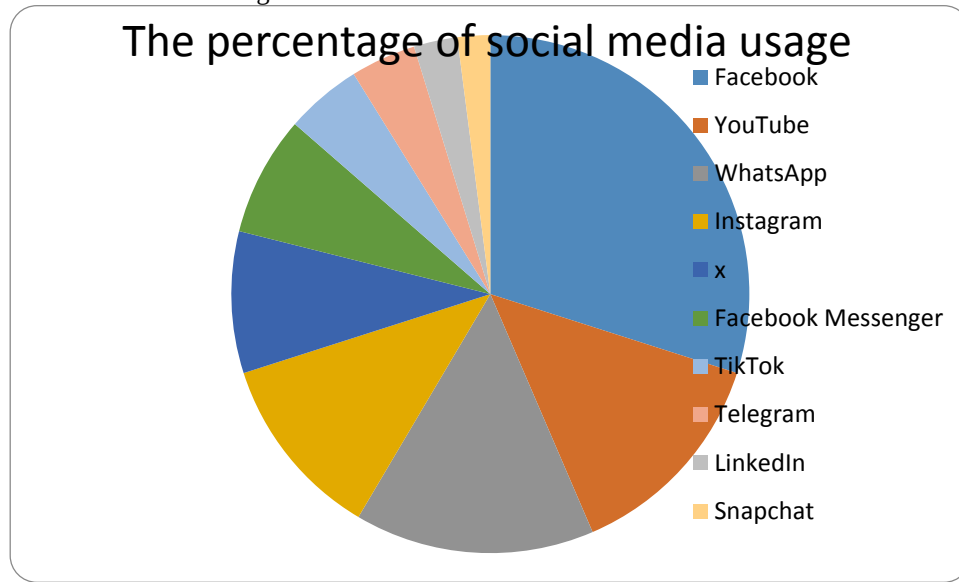
The main reasons for individuals aged 16-64 to use social media platforms are as follows: communicating with friends and family at a rate of 47.6%, followed by filling leisure time at 36.3%, then reading news stories at 34.8%, searching for videos at 30.9%, seeing what others are talking about at 29.1%, finding products to purchase at 26.5%, searching for work-related information at 22.5%, and finally, following celebrities or influencers at 21.3%.

64% of social media users in the age group of 18-24 rely on it as a news source, followed by 63% in the age group of 25-34, 61% in the age group of 35-44, 57% in the age group of 45-54, and 49% aged 55 and above.

The social media platforms used to access news are as follows:

1. Facebook at 44%.
2. YouTube at 30%.
3. WhatsApp at 22%.
4. Instagram at 17%.
5. X at 13%.
6. Facebook Messenger at 11%.
7. TikTok at 7%.
8. Telegram at 6%.
9. LinkedIn at 4%.
10. Snapchat at 3%.

Figure 2: Social Media Platforms Used in News



The source: Compiled by the researchers

Generally, in North Africa, the most commonly used messaging application is Facebook Messenger, while in the Gulf countries, the most commonly used messaging application is WhatsApp.

4.4 The Role of Social Media Platforms in Advancing the Responsible Tourism Industry:

The impact of social media applications on the mechanisms of responsible tourism industry has been significant. In terms of their influence on tourists, they have contributed to:

1. Providing travellers with new ways to search for, discover, and share information about tourist destinations and trips.
2. Transitioning the client from a mere passive consumer to a proactive participant and consumer.
3. Providing travellers with secure channels for booking and purchasing trip products.
4. Exchanging and disseminating information related to past trips and tour programs. On the other side, tourist destinations and establishments have altered and redefined their business models to meet the needs and expectations of this type of traveler.
5. Presenting information, services, and facilities in an attractive and sophisticated manner, thereby redefining traditional business systems.
6. Viewing the client as a stakeholder and contributor, as opposed to just a consumer.
7. Acknowledging that travelers and their interactions through social networks have a high capacity to enhance the mental image of the destination and the tourism product.
8. Recognizing that travelers can promote the destination through their interactions on social media networks.
9. Efficiently researching service providers and engaging with current customers while reaching prospective ones.

10. Viewing tourists as partners in designing, marketing, and producing the tourism experience. Furthermore, communicating with other travelers during the trip provides an opportunity to improve future trips through feedback and enhancing customer complaint management processes, which reflects on the development and innovation of new products.

The significance of social media networks in the tourism industry, known as social media tourism marketing, has emerged as a necessity, characterized by its speed and efficiency in reducing traditional marketing and advertising costs, such as printing brochures and promotional campaigns, which can cost millions. Social media tourism marketing serves as the key to achieving the objectives of any organization. It is noteworthy that social media networks are highly credible among decision-makers, tourism companies, hotels, and all tourism service providers, as they are used to market their products.

Social media networks enable precise targeting of the needs of target markets and ensure positive interaction with potential customers, effectively competing with others. Through social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube, everyone can learn about most tourist destinations by following electronic images and videos, to even selecting hotels or airlines, among others. Moreover, they facilitate information exchange, discussions, and introducing the customs and traditions of the target tourism destination, thus allowing virtual travel to desired countries and precise planning of the trip route, booking preferred places, and learning about the tourism services provided in hotels, resorts, and visit sites (Sahrawi, 2011-2012, p. 46).

The pages and groups present on social media platforms stand out for their regular updating of information and continuous inclusion of recent photos and videos of tourist destinations. These pages provide visitors with diverse information about any tourist site and its services, enabling them to stay informed about the latest developments in the tourism industry and interact with them.

Recent research has indicated that social media platforms, particularly Facebook, have become one of the most influential factors in the tourism and travel sector, which exceeds a global volume of 2 trillion dollars. Studies suggest that travel plans for users are directly influenced by the activities of their friends on Facebook. Although the research included only 20% of active users on the popular social media site Facebook in Germany, the United Kingdom, and the Nordic countries, it is considered that the results of these studies also apply to other countries and regions, including the Middle East and North Africa.

The key findings are summarized as follows:

1. Tourism and travel are among the most discussed and interactive topics within the list of user status updates on Facebook.
2. 84% of the sample indicated that family and friends' vacations were a reference point for their travel plans.
3. 64% of the sample indicated that social Media was the primary reason for them knowing the place where their friends spent their vacations.

4. Conclusion :

By harnessing the power of social media platforms, we can transform tourism into an experience that promotes awareness, communication, and mutual respect, leading to the construction of a better world for future generations.

4.1 Study Results:

Social media platforms serve as rich sources of information about various tourist destinations, but they also serve as forums for exchanging experiences and tips among travellers. These platforms can provide travellers with knowledge about responsible tourism practices, such as environmental protection, respecting local cultures, and promoting sustainable development in local communities.

Through social media, travellers can directly interact with local communities and support the local economy by endorsing local businesses and collaborating with social initiatives. When travellers share their experiences and photos on these platforms, awareness of tourist destinations is enhanced, encouraging visits in a culturally and environmentally respectful manner.

By sharing stories, photos, and experiences on social media platforms, travellers are motivated to take steps towards more responsible travel. These platforms can play a vital role in spreading awareness about sustainable tourism issues and promoting positive social and environmental behaviours among travellers.

4.2 Recommendations:

Despite these benefits, social media platforms also face challenges, as some users may engage in irresponsible travel by sharing photos or engaging in activities that may not align with sustainable tourism principles. Therefore, the following recommendations are offered:

1. Providing information about tourism: Social media platforms can offer educational content and guidance on how to travel responsibly, including environmental sustainability and respecting local cultures.
2. Encouraging participation in environmental and social initiatives: Social media platforms can encourage users to participate in local environmental and social events during their travels by providing information and facilitating connections with local organizations.
3. Enhancing communication with local communities: Social media platforms can enhance communication between tourists and local communities by providing platforms for interaction, exchange of experiences, and stories, promoting mutual understanding and cultural closeness.
4. Encouraging responsible tourism photography: Social media platforms can promote tourism photography that highlights the beauty of tourist destinations positively without causing harm to the surrounding environment or local culture.
5. Providing platforms for reviews and ratings: Social media platforms can provide platforms for travellers to provide comprehensive reviews and ratings of their tourism experiences, including evaluating sustainability and social responsibility of tourism establishments.
6. Collaborating with official bodies and non-governmental organizations: Social media platforms can collaborate with official bodies and non-governmental organizations to develop joint awareness campaigns and initiatives aimed at promoting responsible tourism and sustainability.

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