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## Social Media and Tourists' Decision in Bangladesh: An Empirical Study on Travelling Cox's Bazar

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### Abstract:

Uses of social media are growing throughout the world. In the previous time, various studies have been directed to discover the necessity of motivational factors behind making decision of tourists. From social media attributes, if tourists have positive insight then they will be inspired to revisit the Cox's Bazar in future. Also, the tourist industries have given significance to improve their service as part of marketing management to remain competitive. This study identifies the social media attributes and examines the impact of decision making towards travelling Cox's Bazar. In this study, tourists' perception of Cox's Bazar is also found. Foreign tourists (from Asian, European, American, Australian, and African) are considered as sample for this study. Convenience Sampling and questionnaire survey that are taken from various literatures of tourism. Reliability Test and Descriptive Statistics are conducted to see the availability and normality of collected data. Then Demographic Analysis, Spearman's Rho Correlation Test and finally the Kruskal-Wallis Test have been utilized to find out the relationship among variables. This study discovered that noteworthy impact of social media attributes towards tourists' choice to travel Cox's Bazar. These findings will also contribute to the government as the civil aviation and tourism ministry needs to formulate suitable policies and practices considering social media in the existing market for attracting both inbound and outbound tourists.

**Keywords:** social media; foreign tourist; tourist decision; marketing management; Cox's Bazar.

**JEL Classification:** L83, L86, M38, Q 26, Z32.

## Introduction

The land of Bangladesh is blended with natural good looks, remarkable history, mounts and forests, sea shorelines and so forth. There are numerous appealing spots those are: The Cox's Bazar, Saint Martin Island, The biggest mangrove forest- Sundarbans, Panoramic Sea beach Kuakata, Historical Sixty Domed Shat Gombuj Mosque, The flamboyant lake city-Rangamati, and different renowned spots. Bangladesh is an attractive destination for visitors, wildlife, and research. Cox's Bazar is a standout amongst the best among them. Any person can travel to the delightful and serene place of Bangladesh. People are taking break from their work life to take entertainment beside their economic and social advancement. Thus, making a tour to new place is one of them. As regards, tourist can make their decision to visit desired destination by different ways like use of social media, friends and family and other professional agents. In the 21st century, populations' movement, globalization of the capitalism, and communication technology and transportation advancement has assisted with forming tourism as one of the largest industries in the world. It keeps on developing at an expected rate of 100% over the following 10 years (Burke *et al.* 2001). These days, tourism industry is mostly reliant on the social media globally so that it has strong influence on the tourism industry. Currently, 3.26 billion individuals involve online media on cell phones 2019 according to Global Digital 2019 reports, with a growth of 297 million new clients addressing a year-on-year increment of in excess of 10 percent. For this reason, social media is considered as necessary tool in order to promote tourism industries as well as their marketing strategy. In the context of Bangladesh, some studies have emerged but those are involved with travelers' motivational factors for going Cox's Bazar (Naushin & Yuwanond 2016). Moreover, a study was conducted by Jamila and Siddique in 2013 on problems and prospects of Cox's Bazar for getting the future potentials as tourist place in Bangladesh. The significance of social media is growing in the domain of the tourism business (Rahman & Begum 2020). However, very few research have been done in identifying social media attributes on tourist decision toward making decision for travelling Cox's Bazar in Bangladesh. But the results of other studies found different in the previous time because of study purpose itself and different framework. Therefore, the aim of this study is to discover the impact of social media attributes in stimulating international tourists to visit Cox's Bazar in Bangladesh.

## 1. Literature Review

In the region of South Asia, the emerging economic nation is Bangladesh, and the travel industry is the major sector which is contributing to economic development (TARANNUM 2020). In case of tourist arrivals, the topmost popular tourism destination is Cox's Bazar in Bangladesh, having Sundarban, kuakata sea beach, Patenga sea beach and others top market destinations. Social media performs a key role to get information, online review, and virtual tour presentation to select the desired destinations. These three social media attributes have been identified after reviewing the following literature.

### 1.1 Arrival of Social Media

From the 1950s, various technologies have been created and executed in society. Amid the best technologies that have experienced significant change is the internet during this period. Scientists and researchers concur that the internet has had significant influence on the tourism industry (Xiang and Gretzel 2010).

Laptops, smart phones, and tablets are used by tourists to search for the information concerning their visit and the tourist places with the internet advancement pattern (Wrang and Fesenmair 2013). Tourism industry is largely depending on social media as indispensable tool for connecting probable tourists from different regions of the world. Social media can be said in many ways such as it is a broader concept and the interaction modes are through blogs and forums, photos, videos, records, pages, links relating to websites of social networking. Moreover, it is defined as a partner, online content made by user (Roberts and Kraynak 2008). Through social media, tourists can settle on choices about destination at the present time. This wonder has changed idea and processes of making decision. The travel industry should consider the frames of mind of visitors towards social media and ways to deal with promoting the current information via web-based networking media. In this case, the specific question arises about what particular issues tourists add to social media either correctly or incorrectly by participating in the social sites, as well as the degree to which these issues in the long run influence ultimate decisions (Liu *et al.* 2019).

#### 1.1.1 Information

The act of satisfying a variety of values for a specified product or service is called information search that people pursue in looking for accessible choices (Fodness and Murray 1998; Gursoy and Chen 2000; Nishimura *et al.* 2007; Vogt and Fesenmaier 1998; Cho and Jang 2008). Search of information lessens diverse vulnerability

identified travel plans while improving experiences of tourist (Fodness and Murray 1997). Additionally, comprehending how information is obtained by the customers that is noteworthy for the managerial decision of marketing and for understanding the behavior of tourist (Bieger and Laesser 2004; Molina *et al.* 2010; Gursoy and McCleary 2004; Stepchenkova and Eales 2011; Choi *et al.* 2011; Maser and Weiermair 1998; Murphy *et al.* 2007). For the time being, travelers who consider online platform for the search of tourism information, comprehensive information can be given to fulfill their endeavor to get the travel industry understanding (Tsai 2022).

The people of generation Y can pursue similar directions, music, style, news, and so forth nonstop and this goes additionally for searching and for travelling tourism information (Yen and Halim 2021). Travel has become both informative and intensive industry that allows tourists have access to information easily through the Internet (Qu and Lee 2011). However, the internet creates a key platform for exchanging information between customer and suppliers of (e.g., transport, hotels and attractions), intermediaries (e.g., travel agents), controllers (e.g., governments' administrative bodies), along with several non-profit organizations for instance the vast amount of information potentially of tour organizations available to travelers (Werthner and Klein 1999). Thus, tourists can select the place by evaluating various information found in social media. Likewise, given the expected effect of social media on the online tourism, contribution of social media on travel information exploration are considered vital knowledge to notify better marketing practices of tourism (Wang and Fesenmaier 2007; Gretzel 2006). After reviewing the wide spread analysis of literature, alternative hypothesis is formed and taken to complete the objective of the study.

**H 1:** Information has significant relationship with tourist decision for travelling Cox's Bazar.

### 1.1.2 Online Review

From the travelers, reviews on online for the purpose of acquiring reliable information maximize tourists' satisfaction (Jayathilaka *et al.* 2020). In recent times, growing numbers of tourists use internet for the tour planning (Travel Industry Association 2005); certainly, looking for travel information is one of the highest web-based activities (Pew Internet & American Life Project 2006). Undoubtedly, Compete (2006) stated that almost half of travel buyers visited a message board, online community or forum for purchasing through online and one in three of these customers said that online reviews helped to make their decision on purchase. Gretzel and Yoo (2008) analyzed the usage and influence of online travel websites (Tripadvisor 2014), where their findings demonstrate changes in using these reviews in the different stages of tour aspects and planning.

When high involvement products are purchased, consumers be inclined to depend on reviews of customers (Park *et al.* 2007); subsequently, tourism is a high customer engaging product, anyone can think broad usages of the reviews for the travel-associated decisions. In addition, according to Tripadvisor (2014), "89% of global travelers are influenced by online travel reviews when choosing their accommodation". Nevertheless, it is obvious that reviews through online increase appreciation and enthusiasms of tourists in the course of their planning process (Lopez *et al.* 2012). The views from the Tourists' posted through online contents straight impact the behavioral plans, whereas satisfaction of travelers plays as mediating or indirect influence (Majeed *et al.* 2020). As a result, online review attribute has an impact on making tourism planning process that impacts the reliability and effectiveness of online review along with tourists' inspirations to recommend on online review.

**H 2:** Online Review has significant influence on tourist decision for visiting the Cox's Bazar.

### 1.1.3 Virtual Tour Presentation

Virtual tour presentation is sufficient to encourage individuals to have the option to travel once more (Irwan and Novianti 2021). Virtual tourism aspect might be expected to progress over some time, and accordingly fulfil more demands of tourist (Dewailly 1999). It is important to get a totally different comprehension of what people need to develop a competitive tourist product (Mossberg 2007). Therefore, possible implications of virtual tour tools might be looked at specific tourism attraction like place, theme park and museum.

Virtual tour presentation is characterized through a PC-generated presentation that permits or requires the users to take a feeling of actuality available in the environment than they are indeed in, in addition to work together with that environment (Schroeder 1996). Travelers' aim to take on online visits and that adoption goal affects the propensity to go the desired place (El-Said and Aziz 2021). In this way, the spherical panoramas uses demonstrating architectural perspectives, easily attained and properly included with further contents (recorded textual information, images, audio, and video), aim to the interactive virtual tour construction that are experienced in web portals consisted of interfaces of intuitive navigation (Koeva *et al.* 2017). Huang *et al.* (2013) also said that

the tour presentation through online provides various assistances for the travel players, including generating entertaining and informative virtual surroundings, immense and attractive online experiences, communication via multimedia and social interaction universally. Thereby, virtual tour presentation offered the level of involvement that motivates tourists' response to the appearance of desired destination.

**H 3:** Virtual Tour Presentation has profound effect on taking decision for going Cox's Bazar for the purpose of tourism.

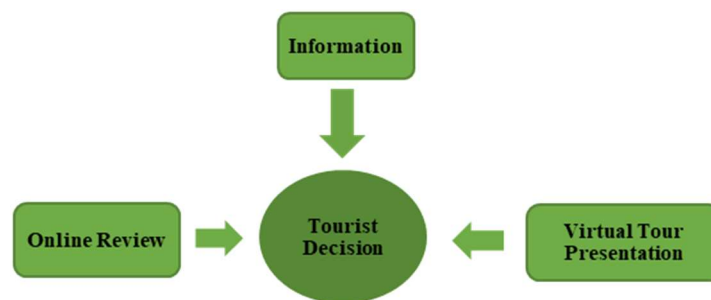
### 1.2 Tourist Decision

Prior to reviewing literature on in what way social media impacts the tourists' choices to visit a particular location, there is essential to assess how social media effect and what are the influences of consumer behavior to the extent that their decision making is concerned. Researchers and scholars concur that there is significant effect of on the trust level occurred by social media among tourists while making their trip planning (Hajli 2014). The impact between social media and motivation of tourists is positive and strong on visiting (Nowreen and Hossain 2021). Crompton (1997) found that "It is recognized that motivation is only one of many factors which could contribute to explaining tourist behavior" and appealed that several disagreements of motivation regarding tourism attempts to stress on push and pull factor. Here, push factors are identified with motivation on sociopsychology as well as the pull factors are identified with the location attributes. However, numerous scholars acknowledge that the tourists' decision process is complicated, multi-faceted course which comprises of different interconnected stages or sub-choices, components, and ideas (Hsu *et al.* 2009; Smallman and Moore 2010; Cohen *et al.* 2014). Yet, travel intentions are significant in comprehension and anticipating the elements that impact decision-making of tourism (Cha *et al.* 1995).

#### Conceptual Framework

From the conceptual framework shown in figure 1, three attributes of social media namely information, online review and virtual tour presentation are considered as significant for encouraging tourists toward making decision to travel cox's bazar. Here, independent variables are information, online review, and virtual tour presentation attribute whereas tourist decision is taken as dependent variable for this study. Nowadays, international tourists browse the internet to get more travel information. Consequently, tourists can make better decision at every stage in tourism planning through using the attributes of social media.

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework



Source: Authors' Compilation

## 2. Methodology

This study focuses on descriptive design along with quantitative approach in order to explain the findings. In Cox's Bazar, 3200 tourists have found staying during the tour in 30 hotels and motels from January to February in 2019. Convenience sampling technique is utilized from non-probability sampling to select the respondents. Thus, 315 tourists are taken as sample size. A questionnaire survey is conducted to collect the data. 370 questionnaires are distributed from where 315 questionnaires are received after completion which represents 9.8% of the total population. The questionnaire is prepared through profound investigation on tourism literature. Each questionnaire is parted into two sections. First section includes demographic information, and second section involves the social media attributes and tourist decision for travelling desired destination. Most of the variables used in this study are taken from the study of Hamid *et al.* (2016). In the social media attributes, there are taken three attributes namely information that is measured by 3 items, online review is measured on the premises of 4 items and virtual tour presentation is measured by 3 items. Here, tourist decision for travelling Cox's Bazar is also measured by 4 items. Five-point Likert scale (strongly disagree for 1, disagree for 2, neutral for 3, agree for 4 and

strongly agree for 5) is used to measure the responses for the purpose of study. For the study, SPSS (Version 21) is conducted to analyse the collected data from tourists of Cox's Bazar. The analysis comprises the use of responses and different statistical methods are used to analyse the impact of social media on tourist decision for travelling Cox's Bazar. Since the five-point likert scale data is ordinal data and it is not normally distributed by nature, Spearman's Rho Correlation analysis is done to find the primary relationship between social media attributes and tourist decision toward visiting Cox's Bazar. After that, Kruskal-Wallis Test is conducted to test hypotheses and the findings are interpreted to establish knowledge and make inferences about the relationship between social media and tourist decision for visiting Cox's Bazar.

### 3. Application Functionality

#### 3.1 Descriptive Statistics

The item means and standard deviation of the social media attributes and tourist decision reflect the similarity of responses about social media attributes and tourist decision for travelling Cox's Bazar are depicted in Table 1.

Table 1. Item Mean and Standard Deviation

	N	Item Mean	Item Standard Deviation
Information	315	3.5999	.56191
Online Review	315	3.5619	.44630
Virtual Tour Presentation	315	3.5810	.51132
Tourist Decision	315	3.5405	.47273
Valid N	315		

Source: Primary Data, 2019

The values represent the statement of the respondents to the social media attributes (specifically information, online review, virtual tour presentation) and tourist decision for travelling Cox's Bazar. The items mean scores for social media attributes and tourist decision ranges from maximum 3.5999 to minimum 3.5405 which shows common feelings of tourist about the social media attributes and tourist decision.

#### 3.2 Reliability and Internal Consistency

Although, five-point Likert scale is used to measure the social media attributes and tourist decision for visiting Cox's Bazar, Cronbach's Alpha has been operated to test the reliability, correctness and consistency of data collected from tourists of Cox's Bazar. Cronbach in 1951 has developed Alpha to give a measure of the internal consistency of a test or scale; it is calculated as a number somewhere between 0 and 1. This test indicates the degree to which one item in variable is interrelated with other items. Reliability and Consistency should be determined before any test is conducted for investigation to make sure the validity of data.

Table 2. Reliability Analysis

Variables	Coefficient of Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha If item deleted
Information	.798	.820
Online Review	.730	.802
Virtual Tour Presentation	.767	.800
Tourist Decision	.726	.805
Overall Value of the study	.936	

Source: Primary Data, 2019

However, the calculated value of Cronbach's Alpha shown in the table 2 for all the items of social media attributes and tourist decision is .936. If item deleted then the Cronbach's Alpha for information is 0.820, online review is 0.802, virtual tour presentation is 0.800 and tourist decision is 0.805. This result identifies both variables have higher reliability.

#### 3.3 Demographic Analysis

Among all the tourists, 11.11 percent were below than 25 years (n=35), 46.03 percent were in the range of 26-35 years (n=145), 15.87 percent tourists were in the age range of 36-45 years (n=50), 13.97 percent were from 46-55 years (n=44) and 13.02 percent were above 56 years old (n=41). It indicates that, majority of the respondents are young tourists. In case of gender, 84.13 percent (n=265) were male while 15.87 percent (n=50) were female of the tourists. In terms of marital status, 64.76 percent of the respondents are single (n=204), 32.38 percent are married (n=102) and the rest 2.86 percent were divorce (n=9). This demonstrates that, most of the tourists who



are single prefer to travel. Maximum number of the respondents were 48.57 percent (n=153) from Asian countries (Nepal, Bhutan, Sri Lanka, Indonesia and India), European countries (France, Ireland, Russia and Poland) accounted for 20.32 percent (n=64), American countries were 9.52 percent (n=30), Australian countries were counted for 12.70 percent (n=40) and 8.89 percent (n=28) were followed by African countries. It is fact that, highest number of tourists comes from Asian region.

### 3.4 Correlation Analysis

Spearman's Rho Coefficient of Correlation Test is done with the total scores of social media attributes (Information, comments and feedback, online tour presentation) and tourist decision toward visiting Cox's Bazar.

Table 3- Spearman's Rho Correlation Metrix

		I (Total)	OR (Total)	VTP (Total)	TD (Total)
I (Total)	Correlation Coefficient	1.000			
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.			
	N	315			
OR (Total)	Correlation Coefficient	<b>.800**</b>	1.000		
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.		
	N	315	315		
VTP (Total)	Correlation Coefficient	<b>.721**</b>	<b>.707**</b>	1.000	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.	
	N	315	315	315	
TD (Total)	Correlation Coefficient	<b>.773**</b>	<b>.770**</b>	<b>.813**</b>	1.000
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.
	N	315	315	315	315

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Source: Primary Data, 2019

In the analysis, information is (showed in the table 3) positively correlated with online review (**.800**), virtual tour presentation (**.721**) and tourist decision (**.773**) at 0.01 level of significance. Moreover, online review is also found positively correlated with virtual tour presentation (**.707**) and tourist decision (**.770**) and it is statistically significant. Furthermore, there is found positive correlation (**.813**) between virtual tour presentation and tourist decision which is also statistically significant. The correlation coefficient values prove statistically that all the item variables of social media attributes and tourist decision are collected positively.

### 3.5 Hypotheses Testing

The Kruskal-Wallis Test was used to test the hypotheses between social media attributes and tourist decision. Thus, there have been developed sub hypotheses to explore which attributes of social media have impact on tourist decision for visiting Cox's Bazar. As all the number of items comprises of social media attributes and tourist decision are not equal, item mean values are taken as a part of the Kruskal-Wallis Test for more accuracy of the outcome.

Table 4. Kruskal-Wallis Test Statistics for hypothesis-1

Tourist Decision for travelling Cox's Bazar	
Chi-Square	158.773
df	2
Asymp. Sig.	.000
N	315
a. Kruskal Wallis Test	
b. Grouping Variable: Information	

Source: Primary Data, 2019

The result of first hypothesis yields a positive value of 158.773 which is greater than the table value at 0.000 level of significance and the p-value is less than the significance level (**p<0.05**). Therefore, there is found profound influence between information and tourist decision for travelling Cox's Bazar. The result shows that, tourists can make better decision for travelling if they get accurate and proper information using social media.

Table 5. Kruskal-Wallis Test Statistics for hypothesis-2

Tourist Decision for travelling Cox's Bazar	
Chi-Square	140.986
df	2
Asymp. Sig.	.000
N	315
a. Kruskal Wallis Test	
b. Grouping Variable: Online Review	

Source: Primary Data, 2019

For the second hypothesis, the calculated value of chi-square ( $\chi^2$ ) is 140.986 which is higher than the table value and the p-value is less than the significance level ( $p < 0.05$ ) that is statistically significant. It recommends that, comments and feedback has powerful positive effect on tourist decision. This implies that, online review as communication through social media has contribution to make suitable decision by tourist to select the destination for tourism.

Table 6. Kruskal-Wallis Test Statistics for hypothesis-3

Tourist Decision for travelling Cox's Bazar	
Chi-Square	161.836
df	2
Asymp. Sig.	.000
N	315
a. Kruskal Wallis Test	
b. Grouping Variable: Virtual Tour Presentation	

Source: Primary Data, 2019

The third hypothesis is formed to test the relationship between online tour presentation and the decision of tourist. The calculated chi-square value is 161.836 that is greater than the table value with p-value of 0.000 which is also lower than the level of significance. Hence, the alternative hypothesis is accepted, and it confirms that virtual tour presentation has strong relationship with tourist decision. This relationship establishes that virtual tour presentation through social media enhances the tourist perception about the actual situation of desired destination which can encourages them to make effective decision.

It is clearly discovered in this study that the positive relationship is established between information, online review, virtual tour presentation and tourist decision as a result of Spearman's Rho Correlation and Kruskal-Wallis Test. A few researchers have addressed both relative and inconsistent outcomes (Yuan *et al.* 2022). The effect of information attribute on tourists' decision has been accounted for pertinent as this result reach agreement with the result of research done by (Ahmed and Kadir 2013; Cao *et al.* 2017). This result was not consistent with the outcome from Hamid *et al.* (2016) that showed negative information attribute of social media and tourist decision. Moreover, the online review has acceptable influence which was found in different ways by (Gretzel and Yoo 2008) on tourist decision. However, virtual tour presentation has been found positive role for making decision of tourists where is supported by the study of Hamid *et al.* (2016). The study is directed by Živković *et al.* (2014) specifies positive impact of social media on tourism choice which is also supported by the findings of this study. Continuously, social media is turning out to be progressively significant, comprising of blogs, reviews, virtual presentation, surveys and interactive sites (Khan and Abir 2022).

## Conclusion

The results of the analysis depend on present condition relating to social media and tourists' decision for travelling Cox's Bazar. The findings make contribution to the enthusiasm of tourists through using social media in order to visit the Cox's Bazar. This study given improved and comprehensive knowledge about the influence of social media attribute on tourists' decision toward visiting Cox's Bazar. This study provides information to enrich the knowledge of service marketing areas in Bangladesh. Specially, the results urge to the policy makers in order to improve services of tourism industries through formulating and implementing contemporary tourism and hospitality management strategies. Besides, with respect to handy ramifications, this exploration offered chances to distinct authorities, for example, Bangladesh Tourism Board, the Ministry of Civil Aviation and Tourism (Bangladesh), Bangladesh Parjatan Corporation, Travel industries and the administrative side in Bangladesh, in observing posted information in online media, which can increase the goodwill of the tourism industry in Bangladesh. In addition, tourism industry can be promoted thorough social media where government can support



(Karim, 2018). Therefore, it is proposed that social media connects more to the websites of tourism industry so as to permit adventurers' errand simpler when looking information on the web. Nonetheless, Social media is essential to inspire the use of web applications by presenting the attractiveness of picture and photographs, tourist spots and thereby increasing facilities to improve the industry. Moreover, Information Communication and Technology in the tourism industries are flourishing in Bangladesh. The tourism and hospitality industry is considered a global industry composed of hospitality management and its activities. Thus, it will be useful to attract the Asian business entrepreneurs to put resources in developing countries as well as Asian tourists to select their desired tourist destination like Bangladesh. Tourists come from different countries around the world to entertain their life. They have different sociocultural background, and they use different types of social media. Therefore, a future study can be undertaken concerning types of social media influencing the tourists' decision for travelling Cox's Bazar in Bangladesh.

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