УДК 338.48:339.138

РОЛЬ СОЦИАЛЬНЫХ СЕТЕЙ В ПРОДВИЖЕНИИ ТУРИЗМА В САУДОВСКОЙ АРАВИИ: СОВРЕМЕННЫЕ ТЕНДЕНЦИИ И ПЕРСПЕКТИВЫ

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Аннотация:

В данной статье рассматривается влияние социальных сетей на развитие туристской индустрии Королевства Саудовская Аравия (КСА). Традиционно Саудовская Аравия воспринималась как один из мировых центров религиозного туризма, прежде всего благодаря паломничеству. Однако благодаря активному внедрению стратегий цифрового маркетинга страна постепенно укрепляет свои позиции в качестве привлекательной туристской дестинации на международном рынке. Особое внимание уделяется роли социальных сетей, влиянию маркетинговых кампаний с участием лидеров мнений (инфлюенсеров), а также пользовательского контента (User-Generated Content, UGC), которые способствуют изменению международного восприятия Саудовской Аравии и преодолению сложившихся стереотипов.

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Ключевые слова: туризм в Саудовской Аравии, Vision 2030, маркетинг в социальных сетях, брендинг туристских дестинаций, инфлюенсер-маркетинг.

THE EVOLVING ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN PROMOTING TOURISM IN SAUDI ARABIA

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Abstract:

This paper explores the impacts of social media on the growth of tourism industry in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA). Conventionally, KSA is seen as a global hub of tourism especially for the purpose of pilgrimage; however, due to the adoption of digital media marketing strategies, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia remains to be one of the most favorite tourism destinations across the globe. Some of the main issues which are covered in this article include the role of social media, the impact of influencer marketing campaigns and the role of user-generated content (UGC) which continue changing the perceptions globally and busting stereotypes.

It focuses on the differences between the traditional and contemporary approaches to marketing and highlights the role of digital engagement in the tremendous rise in tourist influx in the country. It is predicted that the number of tourists in the country will surpass 100 million in 2023. This paper reviews the challenges faced in destination marketing using digital media. These include Instagram versus reality and over-tourism.

Keywords: Saudi Arabia Tourism, Vision 2030, Social Media Marketing, Destination Branding, Influencer Marketing.

1. Introduction

In the present day, the entire global tourism sector realizes that the world of the Internet should not be considered just as an additional tool for destination promotion but as a key player in decision-making process regarding destination choice. It is the fast development of digital technologies and new social networks which have brought about this change – destinations nowadays do not only promote themselves using various marketing techniques but also engage in dialogue with potential visitors. Therefore, the role of digital marketing in the competitive situation of global tourism cannot be overestimated. [7]

For instance, one can refer to the vision of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA), which includes developing tourism as one of the main pillars of sustainable socio-economic development and economic diversification. In order to develop the destination further, the Kingdom is building new resorts, entertainment zones, and even making changes within its tourism marketing approach – investing in digital marketing campaigns and attracting visitors from different parts of the world. [11]

Up until now, Saudi Arabia had no active tourism sector – all that was left of the country's attractions was only pilgrimage tourism to Makkah and Madinah. All other types of tourism were undeveloped and insignificant. The change occurred in 2019, when the tourist e-visa was launched in order to attract foreigners and open up the kingdom to the whole world of tourism.

Social media can be an effective tool for marketing Saudi Arabia as a travel destination globally through the platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, Twitter (strongest rival of X), and Snapchat. Social media helps to market the destination using influencer marketing, UGC (User Generated Content) and campaigns that are dynamic and lively. Social media has helped the country break away from the stereotypes and provide an entertaining and appealing perception of the country. Furthermore, the use of social

media will help in targeting specific types of tourists and interacting with prospective travelers globally. [1, 7]

There are limited studies carried out in the area of platform-specific approaches for the case of Saudi Arabia. This research aims at finding out the effects of social media in promoting the development of tourism in Saudi Arabia in respect to Vision 2030.

In order to explore how social media impacts tourism, this study utilized qualitative methodologies to analyze the effect of the use of social media (SM) within tourism in Saudi Arabia. The research conducted has been based upon the review and analysis of secondary data sources including (but not limited to) academic journals, tourism documentation and examples of digital marketing.

2. Methodology

A systematic review of the most recent literature was conducted based on an analysis of the timeframe (2020 through to 2025) for literature pertaining to the research topic of social media's impact on tourism. Further, a comparative analysis will be used to compare traditional and digital marketing with regards to cost, coverage and interaction.

Case study analysis will be also performed to demonstrate how social media is being utilized for the development of tourism in Saudi Arabia with regards to Vision 2030, specifically with regard to initiatives such as Visit Saudi, Riyadh Season, Al Ula etc. [9, 11]

An additional, specific analysis regarding each platform of SM will be performed to identify how effective each of the selected SM platforms (Instagram, TikTok, Snap, and YouTube) have been in influencing potential tourists.

While completing this study, a few limitations are expected (i.e. reliant on secondary data, fast paced evolution of digital platforms).

3. **Platform-Specific Strategies**

There are many different types of digital marketing methods that Saudi Arabia can take advantage of when it comes to tourism, and understands that there is a unique function of each platform. For instance, Instagram is perfect for presenting the tourism of the country using visual media. Pictures and videos of locations which tourists want to see (for example, Red Sea, AlUla) will promote Saudi Arabia as a desirable place to tour around the world. At the same time, TikTok contains short videos designed to provide relevant information to those who want to know about the activities that occur in the region. Snapchat utilizes geofilters, live chats, and augmented reality to facilitate users. [9, 14]

4.**Influencer Marketing and UGC**

The use of influencer marketing is crucial in driving tourism to Saudi Arabia. The government works with foreign and regional influencers on FAM (familiarization) trips so that the destinations can be explored and the content shared with their followers. Such practices aid in portraying Saudi Arabia as a desirable tourist destination. Besides this, the practice of creating user-generated content has been proven to be effective. When tourists visit a place and share their experience through the means of photos, videos, and other forms of content, it influences others' decision-making process as they view this form of communication as credible and trustworthy. This kind of electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) often proves more persuasive compared to regular advertisements.

5. **Case Study: Saudi Arabia**

The country of Saudi Arabia offers excellent instances of digitalization within the tourism industry, especially within the scope of the Vision 2030 strategy. The country uses innovative ways of digital marketing and social media campaigns to advertise the diversity of tourism offered there, attracting foreign customers. For instance, a perfect

example would be AlUla. The project is centered around cultural and luxury tourism. Using the power of images through platforms like Instagram and YouTube, AlUla appears as a unique place for cultural tours and luxury tourism. This kind of marketing approach attracts cultural tourists and people with higher incomes. In turn, Riyadh Season can be defined as entertainment tourism development within Saudi Arabia. It is advertised with vivid posts in the social media of such type as TikTok and Snapchat. Such advertisements offer the audience the opportunity to attend concerts, festivals, and other large-scale events. [9, 11]

Comparative Analysis

Traditional vs Social Media Marketing To better understand the transformation in tourism promotion strategies, a comparison is presented below:

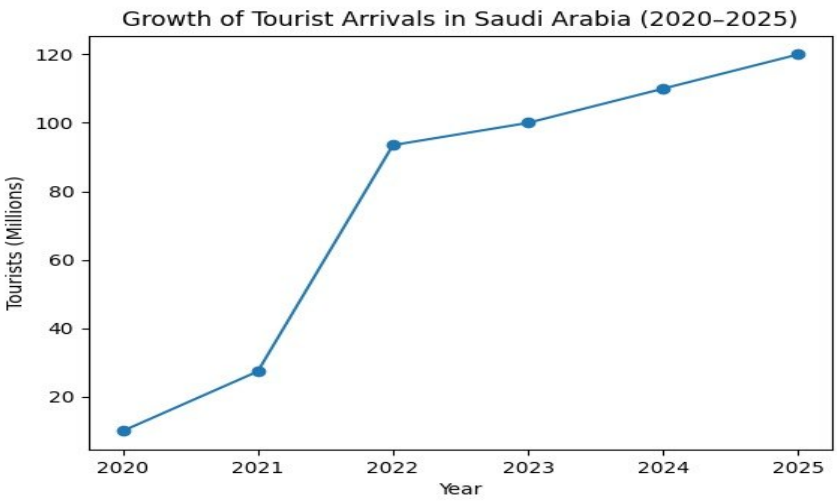
Feature	**Traditional Marketing**	**Social Media Marketing**
Channels	TV, newspapers	Instagram, TikTok
Audience	General	Targeted
Cost	High	Lower
Reach	Limited	Global
Engagement	Low	High
Speed	Slow	Instant

7. Results and Discussion

Based on the findings of the research, it can be noted that the tourism sector in Saudi Arabia has seen tremendous growth in recent times due to the implementation of digital marketing. Social media sites have facilitated communication between tourism

agencies and the audience, creating awareness about the destination through branding and making the destination internationally visible. Digital marketing through influencer marketing and UGC has been vital for the credibility of the destination. Content generated and posted by influencers and travelers themselves have enhanced the value of eWOM, which has a profound effect on tourists' decision-making. In this manner, Saudi Arabia has become one of the world's emerging tourism destinations. However, some problems need to be addressed for the future success of tourism in the country. Issues like data privacy, overtourism, and misrepresentation of the destination need to be managed carefully for sustainable tourism development.

8.Figure: Tourist Growth (2020–2025)



The chart depicts the pattern of tourists arriving in Saudi Arabia during the years between 2020 to 2025. After experiencing a sharp fall in the number of tourists during 2020, caused by the coronavirus pandemic, there has been an increase in the number of tourists year on year after 2020. This positive trend in numbers is the result of the success achieved through the initiatives of the Vision 2030 plan and effective use of digital marketing, such as social media, to promote tourism.

Conclusions

The social media platform is one of the ways in which the government of Saudi Arabia has sought to enhance its tourism by presenting the country as having a positive image on the world stage. Social media has also played an important role in bringing a lot of tourists into the country and building Saudi Arabia as a tourist destination through online marketing activities. The power of social media could help boost the overall destination image of any particular tourist destination, which would enable the country to compete with other destinations as emerging tourism destinations. [7, 9]

The findings from this research study indicate that the use of digital marketing would make it possible for Saudi Arabia to develop its tourism through the creation of new linkages, branding of places, and the tourist decision-making process to choose a destination. While the fast pace of innovation in digital technology has presented some advantages in the development of tourism in Saudi Arabia, there have also been some issues that could arise as challenges to the industry, including sustainability and privacy concerns. Future developments in AI and AR in relation to digital marketing would allow personalisation of the tourist experience in the future. [15]

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