

Exploring the Impact of Social Media Marketing on Tourism Destination Marketing and Revisit Intention: An Empirical Study of Rural Tourism Sectors

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Tourism is widely regarded as one of the largest and fastest growing industries on the world. However, the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on international visitor arrivals and receipts for countries worldwide. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, there has been an increasing trend toward rural tourism, owing to the attractive natural and cultural components. The pandemic's impact on tourism sectors has been severe, with travel restrictions imposed. In this regard, Tourism Malaysia encouraged tourism industry players to transition from a physical to a virtual mode of operation by marketing their products and services online. Recognizing the need for tourism destinations to develop entirely new marketing strategies in the post-COVID-19 era, the establishment of travel brands for tourism destinations is critical to facilitating more effective marketing campaigns. As a result, social media marketing has been recognized as a viable marketing technique for promoting products, services, and information via social networking sites (SNSs). This study aims to fill gaps in the literature and theory by examining the impact of social media marketing activities (SMMA) on tourism destination marketing in the context of rural tourism in Asia, specifically Sarawak, Malaysia. This is perhaps the first study to use the stimulus-organism-response (S-O-R) model to examine how SMMA affect tourism destination marketing and, subsequently, revisit intention for rural tourism destinations in Sarawak, Malaysia. The two-step procedure of partial least squares structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM) estimation was carried out using the WarpPLS software. A total of 239 valid questionnaires were used to assess the fitness of the measurement (inner) and structural (outer) models. Interestingly, the empirical findings indicate that SMMA (i.e., entertainment, interaction, trendiness, customization, and word-of-mouth) all contribute significantly to the success of rural tourism destination marketing efforts. Additionally, it was discovered that a well-developed tourism destination marketing strategy is critical for increasing tourists' intention to revisit, particularly to rural tourism destinations in Sarawak. In conclusion, this empirical study demonstrated that SMMA do contribute to the development of a successful rural tourism destination marketing strategy from a tourist perspective. Eventually, the research provided some useful guidelines for scholars and practitioners (e.g., destination marketing organizations, local communities, industry stakeholders, and tourism-related government departments) interested in rural tourism destination marketing.

Keywords: *Destination Marketing Effort, Malaysia, PLS-SEM Approach, Revisit intention, Rural Tourism, Social Media Marketing Activities (SMMA)*