

THE Social Media Marketing Performance of Travel and Tour Agencies in Zamboanga PENINSULA

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ABSTRACT

This descriptive-correlation study sought to assess the social media marketing performance of travel and tour agencies in the Zamboanga Peninsula. It also examined whether there is an association between the agency characteristics, such as age, sex, educational attainment, years in operation, number of employees, number of social media followers, and the type of services provided, and social media marketing performance across five domains: attracting, engaging, retaining, learning, and relating. Thirty agency owners or managers were chosen as respondents, utilizing an adapted survey questionnaire. The survey employed a five-point Likert scale, and a chi-square test was used in the data analysis. Results indicated that the overall social media marketing performance was satisfactory, with the 'attracting' domain scoring highest and retaining' the lowest. Chi-square analysis revealed no significant association between agency characteristics and overall social media marketing performance. These findings emphasize that agency characteristics alone do not predict effective digital marketing performance and that strategic content development may be more critical.

KEYWORDS: *social media marketing, travel and tourism, quantitative study, Zamboanga Peninsula.*

INTRODUCTION

Social media has transformed how travel businesses operate. However, despite this shift, most of the travel agencies have not been able to make the transition to digital marketing. In the Philippines, the National Economic and Development Authority (2024) reported in its 3rd quarter of 2024 Regional Economic Situationer that local and foreign tourist arrivals in the Zamboanga Peninsula sharply decreased by 88.32 percent. According to Murniati and Bawono (2022), the decline was partly associated with the continued reliance of local travel and tour agencies on traditional marketing approaches and the limited adoption of social media platforms.

These gaps in the digital marketing efforts point to widespread challenges in the tourism industry. Most travel and tour agencies in the Philippines remained heavily dependent on traditional marketing methods while lagging in fully leveraging social media platforms, as evidenced by a study that found only moderate adoption of digital marketing strategies among travel agencies in Region I (Gonzales, 2025). Although previous studies have examined digital marketing practices among travel agencies in other regions of the Philippines, empirical evidence on the social media marketing performance of travel and tour agencies in Region IX remains limited. This lack of regional evidence creates a gap in understanding how travel agencies in the Zamboanga Peninsula utilize social media platforms to support marketing performance and business competitiveness.

The Tourism industry is a major contributor to regional economic growth and progress, accounting for approximately 10 percent of global GDP (WTTC, 2024). According to Phocuswright (2024), in travel and tourism, social media is becoming increasingly important, with 65 percent of travelers relying on it for decision-making. Therefore, travel agencies need to engage on social media not only to inspire trips but also to drive consumer action and boost brand engagement. Effective destination marketing strategies, such as the strategic use of social media, have been highly successful. However, these strategies require additional scrutiny regarding their execution and outcomes.

By conducting this study, key insights were gained into how specific travel and tour agencies' characteristics contribute to marketing success, enabling travel and tour agencies to refine their strategies for optimal effectiveness. This, in turn, can increase competitiveness, stimulate economic growth in the tourism sector, and improve the quality of tourism services. Furthermore, this research advances the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) nos. 8 and 9, which promote decent work, economic growth, and resilient infrastructure.

This study is anchored on Relationship Marketing Theory, which emphasizes the importance of building and maintaining long-term relationships with customers through continuous engagement and interaction. In the context of social media marketing, the theory suggests that organizations can enhance customer attraction, engagement, retention, learning, and relationship development through effective digital communication strategies.

Objectives. This study examined the social media marketing

performance (SMMP) of travel and tour agencies in the Zamboanga Peninsula. It sought to assess the performance of travel and tour agencies across key digital marketing domains and determine whether agency characteristics are associated with social media marketing performance.

Research Questions

1. What are the characteristics of travel and tour agencies in Region IX?
2. What is the level of social media marketing performance of travel agencies and tour agencies in terms of Attracting, Engaging, Retaining, Learning, and Relating?
3. Is there a significant association between the social media marketing performance and the characteristics of travel and tour agencies?

METHODS

Research Design. The study employed a descriptive-correlation research design. This design aimed to describe the characteristics of a population and use statistical procedures to examine relationships among variables (Creswell, 2014). The descriptive-correlational design was deemed appropriate because the study sought to describe the level of social media marketing performance and determine whether significant associations existed between agency characteristics and marketing performance indicators.

Research Locale. The study was conducted in Region IX, or the Zamboanga Peninsula. It covers 3 provinces, namely, Zamboanga del Norte, Zamboanga del Sur, and Zamboanga Sibugay, as well as 1 highly urbanized city of Zamboanga. This study was conducted in the following cities: Pagadian City, Dipolog City, and Zamboanga City. These cities were selected because they serve as major commercial and tourism centers within the Zamboanga Peninsula and host a considerable number of accredited travel and tour agencies, making them appropriate locations for examining social media marketing performance in the region.

Research Respondents. The respondents in the study were 30 travel and tour agency owners/managers distributed across the Zamboanga Peninsula. The research respondents were purposefully chosen using the following criteria: the travel and tour agencies must be located within Dipolog City, Pagadian City, and Zamboanga City of the Zamboanga Peninsula Region, actively engage in the tourism industry, offering travel services, tour packages, and related experiences, be accredited by the Department of Tourism IX, and have been operating for

more than three years. The sample size of 30 respondents was considered adequate for descriptive-correlational analysis, as the study focused on a defined population of accredited travel and tour agencies operating within the selected cities of the Zamboanga Peninsula.

Research Instrument. The researcher adapted a survey tool from Matikite et al. (2016). The survey questionnaire consisted of two sections. Part I concentrated on the demographic profile and the characteristics of travel and tour agencies. This consisted of the name of the owner/manager, name of travel agency, city location, age of owners/managers, sex of owners/managers, educational attainment of manager/owners, years of operation, number of employees, types of services offered, social media platforms used, and number of social media followers. Part II delved into the social media marketing performance of travel and tour agencies across the following domains: attracting (5 items), engaging (5 items), relating (4 items), learning (3 items), and retaining (4 items). A five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) was used to collect responses.

Data Gathering Procedures. The researcher followed the procedures outlined for data collection. Before administering the survey questionnaires, the researcher ensured that respondents provided full consent. All respondents were required to read and sign the Informed Consent Form (ICF). The questionnaires were collected after the respondents completed their evaluation. Each completed questionnaire was assigned a unique code to maintain respondent confidentiality. Important details, such as the date for retrieving the research data, were clarified with 30 travel and tour agencies. Finally, the data were tallied, tabulated, and prepared for statistical analysis.

Statistical Tools. The data gathered were analyzed using mean and standard deviation to assess the level of social media marketing performance of travel and tour agencies in the Zamboanga Peninsula. Moreover, the chi-square test was used to assess the association between travel and tour agency characteristics and their social media marketing performance.

RESULTS

Demographic Profile

The majority of respondents are female (73.3%), indicating a significant presence of women in the travel and tourism industry. Furthermore, most of these respondents are aged 36-55 (56.7%), suggesting that the travel and tour industry in the Zamboanga Peninsula is led by middle-aged individuals. In addition, a substantial proportion of owners and managers hold bachelor's degrees (80%), reflecting a strong educational background among industry leaders.

In terms of operational experience, nearly half (46.7%) of the travel and tour agencies have been in operation for 3-7 years. This indicates that the travel and tour agencies are relatively young. Moreover, most agencies (73.3%) employ fewer than 5 people, indicating that their businesses are small.

Table 1
Profile of the Survey Respondents

Profile	Frequency	Percentage
Sex		
Female	22	73.3
Male	8	26.7
Total	30	100.0
Age		
18 - 35 years old	10	33.3
36 – 55 years old	17	56.7
56 and above	3	10
Total	30	100.0
Educational Background		
Associate Degree	2	6.7
Bachelor's Degree	24	80
Master's Degree	4	13.3
Total	30	100.0
Years of operation		
3-7 years	14	46.7
8-12 years	8	26.7
13-17 years	2	6.7
18 years and above	6	20
Total	30	100.0

No. of employees		
less than 5 employees	22	73.3
6-10 employees	5	16.7
11-15 employees	3	10.0
Total	30	100.0
No. Of Followers		
Below 1000 followers	12	40
1001 - 10 000 followers	11	36.7
10 001 - 50 000 followers	6	20
50 001 - 100 000 followers	1	3.3
Total	30	100.0
Types of Services Offered		
Flight Booking	28	93.0
Hotel Booking	25	83.0
Itinerary planning	25	83.0
Tour Packages	20	67.0
Other	7	23.3
Types of Social Media Platforms Used		
Facebook	30	100.0
Instagram	8	27.0
TikTok	3	10.0
Twitter	2	7.0
YouTube	1	3.0

When it comes to social media presence, travel and tour agencies have fewer than 1,000 followers (40%), suggesting limited reach from their digital marketing efforts. Additionally, travel services primarily offered are more focused on travel arrangements, with flight booking (93%). Furthermore, all travel and tour agencies utilize Facebook as their primary social media platform, emphasizing its importance in their marketing strategies.

Level of Social Media Marketing Performance

The results in Table 2 reveal the social media marketing performance of travel and tours in Zamboanga Peninsula. The overall mean across the domains of social media marketing performance is 3.95, which is considered high and interpreted as satisfactory. Among the five domains, attracting had the highest category mean of 4.25 (very high), indicating it is highly satisfactory, while retaining had the lowest category mean of 3.53 (high), indicating it is satisfactory.

Table 2*Level of Social Media Marketing Performance of Travel and Tour Agencies*

Domains/Statements	Mean	SD	Description
Attracting			
1. Presenting a profile page on social networking sites.	4.50	0.731	Very High
2. Showing website on the social networking site page.	3.63	1.377	High
3. Promoting discounted services on social networking sites.	4.10	1.062	High
4. Showing pictures of services offered.	4.30	0.952	Very High
5. Providing contact information such as company email address and phone number on social networking site homepage.	4.70	0.466	Very High
<i>Category Mean</i>	<i>4.25</i>	<i>0.598</i>	<i>Very High</i>
Engaging			
1. Answering guests' inquiries on social networking sites.	4.57	0.858	Very High
2. Handling guests' complaints on social networking sites.	4.30	1.055	Very High
3. Introducing new services to guests through social networking sites.	4.40	0.814	Very High
4. Presenting a discussion wall on the social networking site page.	3.40	1.037	High
5. Engaging customers in lucky draws.	1.93	1.015	Low
<i>Category Mean</i>	<i>3.72</i>	<i>0.603</i>	<i>High</i>
Retaining			
1. Presenting games, contests, and forums to users.	1.90	0.960	Low
2. Providing hyperlinks on their home page to related sites.	2.67	1.269	Moderate
3. Having security features such as access controls, strong passwords, and regular audits to protect our website and social networking sites.	4.57	0.728	Very High
4. Having privacy statements on their website and social networking sites.	4.20	0.805	Very High
5. Listening and responding to negative comments immediately.	4.33	0.844	Very High
<i>Category Mean</i>	<i>3.53</i>	<i>0.496</i>	<i>High</i>
Learning			
1. Capturing information about customers and prospects.	4.43	0.728	Very High
2. Supporting chat groups.	3.93	0.907	High
3. Performing market research using social networking sites.	4.00	1.083	High
<i>Category Mean</i>	<i>4.12</i>	<i>0.714</i>	<i>High</i>

Relating				
1. Updating customers about content change.	4.37	0.765	Very High	
2. Engaging in real-time interaction with the customers.	4.40	0.814	Very High	
3. Providing personalized responses.	4.47	0.681	Very High	
4. Providing linkages to core business.	3.33	1.124	Moderate	
Category Mean	4.14	0.575	High	
Overall Mean	3.95	0.449	High	

Attracting. This domain had a category mean score of 4.25, which is very high and indicates it is highly satisfactory. The statement about providing contact information, such as a company email address and phone number, on their social networking site homepage received the highest mean score of 4.70, indicating it is highly satisfactory. On the other hand, the statement about showing their website on their social networking site page received the lowest mean score of 3.63, which is considered high and indicates that it is satisfactory.

Engaging. The category mean for this domain was 3.72, which is high and indicates it is satisfactory. The statement about the company answering guests’ inquiries on social networking sites yielded the highest mean score of 4.57, which is described as very high and indicates high satisfaction. Conversely, the statement about the company engaging customers in lucky draws received the lowest mean score of 1.93, which is considered low, indicating lower satisfaction.

Retaining. This domain yielded the lowest category, a mean score of 3.53, described as high, interpreted as satisfactory. Of the five statements under this category, the item about having security features such as access controls, strong passwords, and regular audits to protect their website and social networking sites got the highest mean score of 4.57, indicating it is highly satisfactory. On the contrary, the statement about presenting games, contests, and forums to users received the lowest mean score of 1.90, which is considered low, suggesting it is less satisfactory.

Learning. The category mean for this domain is 4.12, which is described as high and indicates that it is satisfactory. The statement on capturing information about customers and prospects received the highest mean score of 4.43, indicating it is highly satisfactory. While the statement about supporting chat groups received the lowest mean score of 3.93, which is considered high and interpreted as satisfactory.

Relating. This domain yielded a category mean of 4.14, indicating very high satisfaction. Of the four statements, the item on providing personalized responses had the highest mean score of 4.47, indicating high satisfaction. On the other hand, the statement about providing linkages to core business yielded the lowest mean score of 3.33, which is described as moderate and indicates that it is fairly satisfactory.

Test of Association Between Social Media Marketing Performance and Characteristics of Travel and Tour Agencies

The data in Table 3 shows the association between the level of social media marketing performance among travel and tour agencies and various profiles identified, revealing that none of the characteristics – sex, age, educational background, years of operation, number of employees, number of social media followers, types of services offered, and types of social media platforms used had a statistically significant association. All p-values in each characteristic exceed the conventional threshold of 0.05, indicating that the differences in social media marketing performance across the profiles are not significant.

Table 3
Test of Association Between the Level of Social Media Marketing Performance and Characteristics of Travel and Tour Agencies

Profile	Chi-Square Value	p-value	Remarks
Sex	1.572	0.456	Not Significant
Age	2.839	0.585	Not Significant
Educational Background	2.664	0.615	Not Significant
Years of operation	9.731	0.136	Not Significant
No. of employees	7.538	0.110	Not Significant
No. Of Followers	8.965	0.176	Not Significant
Types of Services Offered	11.513	0.174	Not Significant
Types of Social Media Platforms Used	5.715	0.456	Not Significant

DISCUSSION

Demographic Profile

The predominance of small agencies and the limited number of social media followers suggest opportunities to strengthen digital marketing initiatives to expand market reach, enhance customer engagement, and improve competitiveness within the regional tourism industry.

Level of Social Media Marketing Performance

Attracting. This confirms Afren's (2024) findings that many businesses use social media to promote tourism by showcasing services, sharing visual content, and providing essential information such as contact details. Also, he has observed that maintaining a profile page, promoting discounted services, and uploading pictures of the services offered are effective ways to attract customers. Similarly, Nguyen et al. (2024) found that destination and user-generated content on social media by destination marketing organizations (DMOs) improve brand equity and customer satisfaction when new technologies are used to create visual content. Both studies highlight the role of social media in destination marketing, emphasizing that visual engagement and accessible information are crucial for attracting potential customers.

Engaging. The findings align with those of Choudhary and Khatoon (2024), who found that active social media communication significantly impacts visitor loyalty and emphasized the importance of sustained, rational communication. Similarly, Awan et al. (2022) found that both destination- and user-generated content on social media positively impact value co-creation, online customer experience, and customer well-being, underscoring the importance of two-way communication in building trust and satisfaction. In addition, reduced engagement with activities such as lucky draws aligns with the work of Al-Khazanah et al. (2023), who found that online community engagement significantly affects word-of-mouth intention and highlighted the need for participation rather than gimmicks to promote the product.

Retaining. The findings for this domain align with those of Awan et al. (2022), who found that customer retention can be promoted by fostering a sense

of community and trust through social media. A concern for their work is that personalized, engaging interactions lead customers to stick with the brand in the long term. Their findings also show that customer retention is critical, driven by privacy and security measures for customers, which aligns with the study's high scores in these areas. Similarly, Albutra et al. (2024) stressed the importance of social media marketing efforts, noting that trust-building and interactive strategies are key to fostering loyalty and long-term customer relationships with the brand. Moreover, the poor rating for providing games, contests, and forums indicates a missed opportunity. In line with this, Tam et al. (2024) emphasized that social media marketing activities have a profound effect on tourist satisfaction, engagement, and loyalty, with satisfaction and engagement mediating the relationship between social media marketing and loyalty.

Learning. The study by Mukhopadhyay et al. (2023) supports this finding by demonstrating how customer feedback can be enhanced for travel experiences through social media analytics and highlighting the crucial role of social media analytics in understanding tourist sentiments. Similarly, Phocuswright (2023) noted that more than half of leisure travelers base their travel decisions on social media, underscoring the need for travel companies to have a significant digital footprint. Additionally, Saul (2023) noted that better visual content, such as bright images and videos, also has a powerful effect on travelers' tastes. Based on the data, the necessity of social media extends beyond information sharing to enabling customer interaction and occupying a critical role in the industry. Furthermore, Martins et al. (2025) explain that social media for learning purposes within travel agencies provides valuable real-time data and insights that can lead to personalized service delivery and enhance customer bonds, making it a key option in tourism digital marketing.

Relating. The findings of this study align with those of Azhar et al. (2023), which demonstrate that brand trust and brand loyalty positively influence purchase intentions, and that social media marketing positively influences brand trust and loyalty. As their findings show, personalized interactions on social media platforms can help strengthen customer relationships and consumer loyalty. When companies personalize their responses and communicate directly, they strengthen relationships and increase support. In this regard, it is consistent with Siregar et al. 's (2023) findings, which stressed that the real-time, interactive nature of social media increases customer engagement and strengthens relationships. Similarly, according to Davidson and Rodriguez (2023), leveraging real-time analytics and quick digital interactions significantly

increases customer satisfaction and loyalty in the tourism and hospitality sectors.

Test of Association Between Social Media Marketing Performance and Characteristics of Travel and Tour Agencies

The findings affirmed Gupta et al.'s (2024) finding that the number of posts is not a significant factor in determining the influence of social media marketing on small businesses' success. In turn, what really counts in achieving success is well-designed strategies, well-produced content, and targeted marketing campaigns. Additionally, Jain (2022) observes that the efficacy of social media marketing is highly dependent on the agency's strategic approach rather than the size of the business or the owner.

Moreover, the study by Chiwaridzo and Masengu (2023) identifies the secret behind the success of social media marketing in tourism as a firm's relationship-oriented capabilities, such as personalized services and prompt responses, rather than the organization's structure. The study found that travel and tour agencies in the Zamboanga Peninsula demonstrated a satisfactory level of social media marketing performance, with attracting customers emerging as the strongest dimension and retaining customers as the weakest. Furthermore, no significant association was found between agency characteristics and social media marketing performance. These findings suggest that effective social media marketing may depend more on strategic implementation and content quality than on organizational characteristics. Strengthening customer retention strategies and enhancing interactive digital engagement may further improve marketing effectiveness among travel and tour agencies in the region.

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