

IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF COASTAL TOURISM IN INDIA WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO WEST BENGAL

Dr. Gopa Pramanik

Coordinator, Assistant Professor

Dept. of Journalism & Mass Communication

West Bengal State University

Kolkata 126

Abstract: Tourism plays a vital role in India's economic development, and coastal tourism has emerged as a significant component of the tourism industry. This study examines the impact of social media on the development of coastal tourism in India, with special reference to Digha, West Bengal. The research aims to analyse how social media has contributed to shaping the image of Digha as a coastal tourism destination. A descriptive and analytical research design was adopted using both primary and secondary data sources. Primary data were collected from 100 tourists and 50 tourism stakeholders, including hotel owners, hotel staff, and beach hawkers. The findings reveal that 85% of tourists used social media before visiting Digha, with photographs (35%) and videos (25%) being the most influential forms of content. Among stakeholders, 84% believed that social media had increased tourist arrivals, while Facebook emerged as the most effective promotional platform. The qualitative analysis further indicates that Digha functions as the leading coastal tourism destination in West Bengal due to its accessibility, infrastructure, and visibility. The study concludes that social media has significantly influenced destination image, tourist awareness, and tourism promotion, contributing to the sustained growth and popularity of Digha as a coastal tourism destination.

IndexTerms - Social Media, Coastal Tourism, Digha, Destination Image, Tourism Promotion, West Bengal, Tourist Perception, Digital Communication.

INTRODUCTION

Tourism has emerged as one of the most significant sectors contributing to economic growth, employment generation, and cultural exchange in India. Among its various forms, coastal tourism has gained considerable importance due to the country's extensive coastline and diverse marine attractions. Coastal destinations attract tourists for recreation, leisure, and cultural experiences, thereby contributing to regional development. West Bengal, located on the eastern coast of India, possesses several notable coastal destinations, including Digha, Mandarmani, Tajpur, and Shankarpur, which have become popular tourist attractions over the years. The development of information and communication technologies during the first decade of the twenty-first century transformed the way tourism destinations were promoted and experienced. Social media platforms emerged as important communication tools, enabling tourism stakeholders to share information, photographs, travel experiences, and destination-related updates with a wider audience. Platforms such as Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, blogs, and online travel forums had become increasingly influential in shaping tourist perceptions and travel decisions. Social media provided coastal tourism destinations with cost-effective promotional opportunities and enhanced interaction between tourists and tourism service providers. User-generated content, including reviews, comments, photographs, and travel narratives, played a significant role in creating awareness and influencing destination image. For coastal destinations in West Bengal, social media contributed to increased visibility and accessibility among domestic tourists seeking information before planning their trips. Despite the growing significance of social media in tourism promotion, limited academic attention has been given to its role in the development of coastal tourism in India, particularly in the context of West Bengal. Understanding the relationship between social media usage and coastal tourism development

is essential for evaluating its contribution to destination promotion, tourist engagement, and regional tourism growth. Therefore, this study seeks to examine the impact of social media on the development of coastal tourism in India, with special reference to West Bengal.

OBJECTIVE

To analyse the impact of social media in shaping the image of coastal tourism in Digha, West Bengal

LITERATURE REVIEW

The emergence of social media has significantly influenced tourism promotion and destination marketing across the world. Scholars have highlighted the growing role of digital communication platforms in shaping tourist perceptions, destination image, and travel decision-making. Kaplan and Haenlein (2010), in their influential article *"Users of the World, Unite! The Challenges and Opportunities of Social Media"* published in *Business Horizons*, defined social media as internet-based applications that facilitate the creation and exchange of user-generated content. The authors argued that social media transformed traditional marketing by enabling direct interaction between organizations and consumers. Xiang and Gretzel (2010), in their article *"Role of Social Media in Online Travel Information Search"* published in *Tourism Management*, found that social media had become an important source of travel information. Their study demonstrated that tourists increasingly relied on online reviews, blogs, and social networking sites while planning their trips, thereby influencing destination choice and travel behaviour. Hudson and Thal (2013), in *Journal of Travel & Tourism Marketing*, examined the effectiveness of social media marketing in tourism. Their findings revealed that tourism organizations benefited from social media through increased customer engagement, destination awareness, and promotional reach. The study emphasized the growing importance of Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube in tourism marketing strategies. According to Leung, Law, Van Hoof, and Buhalis (2013), in their review article published in the *Journal of Travel & Tourism Marketing*, social media played a crucial role in tourism and hospitality management by facilitating communication between tourists and service providers. The authors highlighted the importance of user-generated content in influencing destination image and tourist satisfaction. Buhalis and Law (2008), in their landmark article *"Progress in Information Technology and Tourism Management"* published in *Tourism Management*, discussed how technological innovations transformed tourism marketing and destination management. They argued that digital platforms enhanced information accessibility and strengthened tourist participation in destination promotion. From an Indian perspective, Bhatia's book *Tourism Development: Principles and Practices* (2011) emphasized the importance of communication technologies in tourism development. The author noted that internet-based promotion was becoming increasingly relevant for attracting domestic tourists to emerging destinations. Tourism has been widely recognized as a catalyst for economic development, employment generation, and regional growth in India. S. C. Bagri (2003), in *Trends in Tourism Promotion: Emerging Issues*, emphasized that effective promotion and marketing are essential for enhancing the competitiveness of tourism destinations. He argued that advancements in communication technologies have significantly transformed tourism promotion strategies. Later, Bagri (2006) highlighted the importance of sustainable tourism planning and destination management for long-term tourism development in India. The role of information technology in tourism gained increasing attention during the early 2000s. Bagri, Mahar, and Uniyal (2013) observed that technological innovations and online communication platforms were becoming integral to tourism marketing and tourist decision-making. Their work suggested that digital media enabled destinations to reach larger audiences and improve tourist engagement. Indian tourism researchers have also examined the significance of destination image in attracting visitors. Studies indicate that tourists increasingly depend on online information, reviews, photographs, and travel experiences shared by other users before selecting a destination. User-generated content contributes to destination awareness and influences travel behavior, particularly among younger tourists. The emergence of social networking sites such as Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter before 2015 strengthened destination promotion through electronic word-of-mouth communication. In the context of West Bengal, coastal tourism has emerged as a major component of the state's tourism industry. Digha, Mandarmani, Tajpur, and Shankarpur have become important beach destinations due to their natural beauty and accessibility. Research on Digha has primarily focused on tourism development, environmental sustainability, and tourist inflow patterns. Studies by scholars such as Sanjana Mondal and Jaydip Sen (2017) demonstrated the growing popularity of Digha and Mandarmani and emphasized the increasing tourist movement to these destinations. Although several studies have examined tourism development and coastal tourism in West Bengal, limited research has specifically explored the role of social media in shaping the

image of Digha before 2015. Existing literature largely concentrates on infrastructure, environmental issues, and tourism growth rather than digital promotion. Therefore, a research gap exists regarding how social media platforms influenced tourists' perceptions, destination image, and the development of coastal tourism in Digha during the pre-2015 period. The present study seeks to address this gap by examining the impact of social media on the development and image of coastal tourism in Digha, West Bengal. The studies reviewed indicate that social media became a powerful tool for destination promotion, tourist engagement, and image formation before 2015. However, most existing research focused on global or national tourism trends, with limited attention to coastal tourism destinations in West Bengal. The role of social media in shaping the image and development of coastal destinations such as Digha, Mandarmani, Tajpur, and Shankarpur remains insufficiently explored. This research seeks to address this gap by examining the impact of social media on the development of coastal tourism in West Bengal, with special reference to Digha, up to 2015.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The present study adopts a **descriptive and analytical research design** to examine the impact of social media on the development of coastal tourism in India with special reference to West Bengal. The study focuses on understanding how social media platforms influenced the image, visibility, and promotion of coastal tourism destinations, particularly Digha. The research combines qualitative and quantitative approaches to provide a comprehensive analysis of the relationship between social media and tourism development.

Area of Study

The study is confined to the coastal tourism destinations of West Bengal, with particular emphasis on **Digha**, one of the most prominent beach destinations in the state. Digha serves as the primary case study due to its popularity and extensive representation on social media platforms.

Nature of Data

The study utilizes both primary and secondary data. Primary data will be collected from: Domestic tourists visiting Digha, Tourism stakeholders such as hotel owners, tour operators, travel agents, and local tourism officials. Secondary data will be collected from: Books, journals, and research articles, Government reports and tourism statistics, Reports published by the Ministry of Tourism, Government of India, West Bengal Tourism publications, Archived social media content, blogs, travel forums, and online reviews available up to 2015.

Sampling Technique

A purposive sampling method will be employed to select respondents who have experience with social media and coastal tourism. Tourists who visited Digha and used social media for travel-related information will be included in the sample. 150–200 tourist respondents, 20–30 tourism stakeholders. The sample size may be adjusted according to the availability of respondents and research requirements.

Data Collection Tools

The following tools will be used: Structured questionnaire for tourists, Semi-structured interview schedule for tourism stakeholders, Content analysis of social media posts, travel blogs, online reviews, photographs, and tourism-related discussions.

Variables of the Study

Independent Variables: Social Media Usage (Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, Blogs, Travel Forums).
Dependent Variables, Destination Image, Tourist Awareness, Tourist Decision-Making, Tourism Promotion, Coastal Tourism Development.

Methods of Data Analysis

The collected data will be analysed using: Percentage analysis, Frequency distribution, Mean and ranking techniques, Tables and graphical representation, thematic analysis for qualitative data, Content analysis of social media materials. Scope of the Study: The study is limited to examining the influence of social media on the image and development of coastal tourism destinations in West Bengal, particularly Digha, up to the year 2015. It seeks to identify the role played by social media in promoting destination awareness, influencing tourist perceptions, and contributing to coastal tourism growth. **Limitations of the Study:** The study is confined to selected coastal destinations in West Bengal, Historical social media data before 2015 may be limited or inaccessible, Findings are based on respondents' recollections and available archival records, The study does not cover developments in social media after 2015.

Here is a table of major Indian coastal tourism destinations followed by an analytical discussion.

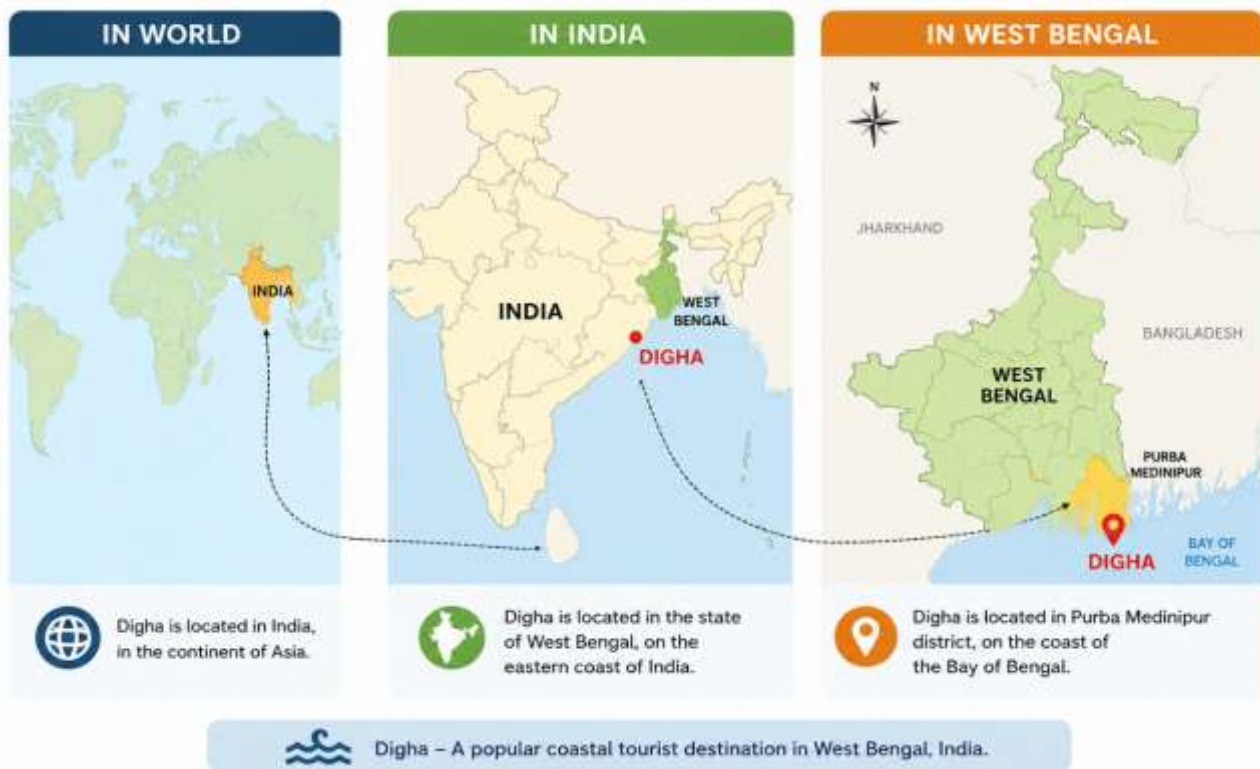
Major Coastal Tourism Destinations in India

State/UT	Coastal Destination	Key Attractions	Tourism Significance
West Bengal	Digha	Beaches, Marine Aquarium, Sunrise Views	Most popular beach destination in eastern India
West Bengal	Mandarmani	Long motorable beach, Water Sports	Emerging coastal tourism hub
West Bengal	Tajpur	Red Crab Beach, Eco-tourism	Known for nature-based tourism
West Bengal	Shankarpur	Fishing Harbour, Beach Tourism	Combines tourism and fishing activities
Odisha	Puri	Golden Beach, Jagannath Temple	Religious and coastal tourism destination
Odisha	Chandipur	Vanishing Sea Beach	Unique natural phenomenon
Goa	Calangute	Beach Activities, Nightlife	International tourism hotspot
Goa	Baga	Water Sports, Entertainment	High tourist inflow throughout the year
Kerala	Kovalam	Crescent-shaped Beaches, Ayurveda	Major international tourist destination
Kerala	Varkala	Cliff Beach, Spiritual Tourism	Blend of leisure and wellness tourism
Tamil Nadu	Marina Beach	Urban Beach, Cultural Heritage	One of the longest urban beaches in the world
Tamil Nadu	Mahabalipuram	Shore Temple, UNESCO Heritage Site	Heritage and coastal tourism
Andhra Pradesh	Visakhapatnam (RK Beach)	Beachfront, Scenic Landscape	Major coastal city tourism destination
Karnataka	Gokarna	Beaches, Pilgrimage Tourism	Popular among domestic and foreign tourists
Maharashtra	Ganpatipule	Temple and Beach Tourism	Religious and recreational tourism
Gujarat	Dwarka	Coastal Pilgrimage Centre	Religious and heritage tourism
Andaman & Nicobar Islands	Havelock Island (Swaraj Dweep)	Coral Reefs, Scuba Diving	Premium marine tourism destination
Lakshadweep	Agatti Island	Lagoons, Marine Biodiversity	Eco-tourism and adventure tourism

Analytical Discussion

India possesses a coastline of more than 7,500 kilometers, making coastal tourism one of the most significant segments of the country's tourism industry. Coastal destinations attract visitors for leisure, recreation, adventure, religious activities, and cultural experiences. The diversity of India's coastal regions provides varied tourism products ranging from beach tourism in Goa and Digha to marine tourism in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands. The western coast, particularly Goa and Kerala, has experienced substantial tourism growth due to better infrastructure, international promotion, and strong digital presence. These destinations have successfully utilized online marketing and social media platforms to build strong destination images among domestic and international tourists. The eastern coast, including West Bengal and Odisha, has witnessed increasing tourist arrivals due to improved connectivity and destination promotion. Digha, Mandarmani, Tajpur, and Shankarpur have emerged as important coastal tourism centres in West Bengal. Social media has played a crucial role in enhancing their visibility through tourist-generated photographs, reviews, travel blogs, and videos. A comparative analysis indicates that destinations with stronger digital promotion and higher levels of tourist engagement on social media generally attract greater tourist inflows. Social media contributes to destination branding, information dissemination, and electronic word-of-mouth communication, which significantly influence tourists' travel decisions. For West Bengal, Digha remains the leading coastal destination, while Mandarmani and Tajpur represent emerging tourism markets. The growing use of social media before and after 2015 has strengthened the image of these destinations and contributed to the development of coastal tourism by increasing awareness, accessibility, and tourist participation. Thus, coastal tourism development in India increasingly reflects the influence of digital communication and social media-driven destination promotion.

DIGHA: LOCATION MAP



Major Coastal Tourism Destinations of West Bengal: Analytical Table

Coastal Destination	Location	Major Attractions	Tourism Characteristics	Analytical Observation
---------------------	----------	-------------------	-------------------------	------------------------

Digha	Purba Medinipur	Old Digha, New Digha, Marine Aquarium, sea beach	Most developed and popular beach destination in West Bengal	Acts as the tourism hub of coastal Bengal due to good connectivity, infrastructure, and year-round tourist flow.
Mandarmani	Purba Medinipur	Long sandy beach, red crabs, water activities	Emerging resort-based tourism destination	Attracts middle- and upper-income tourists seeking less crowded beaches and resort experiences.
Tajpur	Purba Medinipur	Red crab habitat, casuarina forests, eco-tourism	Quiet and less commercialized destination	Popular among eco-tourists and visitors seeking natural and peaceful environments.
Shankarpur	Purba Medinipur	Fishing harbour, beach landscape, sunrise views	Fishing and tourism-based economy	Combines marine livelihood activities with tourism, offering an authentic coastal experience.

Analytical Discussion

Coastal tourism in West Bengal is primarily concentrated along the Bay of Bengal coastline, particularly in the districts of Purba Medinipur and South 24 Parganas. Among all destinations, Digha remains the most significant coastal tourism center and is often referred to as the "Brighton of the East." Its well-developed infrastructure, transportation facilities, accommodation sector, and recreational attractions make it the leading beach destination in the state. The development of nearby destinations such as Mandarmani, Tajpur, and Shankarpur has created a coastal tourism circuit around Digha. This cluster approach allows tourists to experience different forms of tourism, including leisure tourism, eco-tourism, adventure tourism, and community-based tourism. From a research perspective, Digha represents a mature tourism destination, whereas Mandarmani and Tajpur illustrate the transition from emerging to developing coastal destinations. Social media has played an important role in promoting these beaches through photographs, travel blogs, online reviews, and user-generated content. Before 2015, platforms such as Facebook, YouTube, travel forums, and blogs increasingly contributed to destination awareness and tourist decision-making. For a thesis on social media and coastal tourism, Digha serves as the ideal case study because it functions as the nucleus of West Bengal's coastal tourism network, influencing tourist flows to nearby beaches such as Mandarmani, Tajpur, Shankarpur, and Udaipur. The growth of these destinations demonstrates how digital communication and destination image-building can contribute to regional tourism development.

Qualitative Analysis of Major Coastal Tourism Destinations of West Bengal

Digha: The Tourism Hub of Coastal West Bengal

Digha is recognized as the most developed coastal tourism destination in West Bengal. The presence of attractions such as Old Digha, New Digha, the Marine Aquarium, and the extensive sea beach has contributed to its popularity among domestic tourists. The destination benefits from well-developed transportation networks, accommodation facilities, and tourism infrastructure. As a result, Digha functions as the central hub of coastal tourism in the state. Tourists perceive Digha as an accessible and family-friendly destination, making it a preferred choice for leisure and recreation throughout the year.

Mandarmani: Emerging Resort-Based Tourism

Mandarmani has emerged as a modern coastal tourism destination characterized by luxury resorts, long sandy beaches, and recreational water activities. The destination attracts visitors seeking a more exclusive and less crowded beach experience compared to Digha. The growth of resort tourism has enhanced the economic value

of the area and diversified coastal tourism offerings in West Bengal. Tourists often associate Mandarmani with relaxation, comfort, and premium tourism experiences.

Tajpur: An Eco-Tourism Destination

Tajpur is known for its natural environment, red crab habitats, and casuarina forests. Unlike Digha and Mandarmani, Tajpur remains relatively less commercialized. The destination appeals to tourists who prefer peaceful surroundings and environmentally sustainable tourism experiences. The natural landscape and biodiversity contribute to Tajpur's image as an eco-tourism destination. Visitors are primarily motivated by the desire to experience nature and escape urban congestion.

Shankarpur: Integration of Tourism and Traditional Livelihood

Shankarpur represents a unique combination of tourism and fishing-based economic activities. The fishing harbour, scenic beach, and sunrise views provide visitors with an authentic coastal experience. Unlike highly commercialized destinations, Shankarpur allows tourists to observe local fishing practices and coastal community life. This interaction between tourism and traditional livelihoods enhances the cultural value of the destination and supports community-based tourism development.

Analysis based on Major Coastal Tourism Destinations of West Bengal

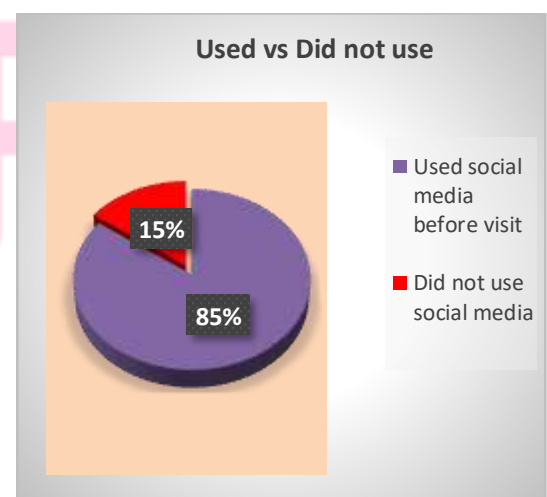
The qualitative findings indicate that each coastal destination possesses a distinct tourism identity. Digha serves as the primary tourism centre, Mandarmani represents resort-based tourism, Tajpur promotes eco-tourism, and Shankarpur highlights community and livelihood-based tourism. Together, these destinations contribute to the diversification and sustainable development of coastal tourism in West Bengal. Their unique characteristics attract different categories of tourists and strengthen the state's position as an important coastal tourism region in eastern India.

The Primary data has been collected from two groups:

1. Tourists (Visitors)
2. Tourism Stakeholders (Hotel Owners, Hotel Staff, Beach Hawkers, Local Business Operators)

Sample Percentage Analysis (Tourists) (N = 100)

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Used Social Media Before Visit	85	85%
Did Not Use Social Media	15	15%
Influenced by Photos	35	35%
Influenced by Videos	25	25%
Influenced by Reviews	20	20%
Influenced by Blogs	12	12%
Influenced by Friends' Posts	8	8%



A majority (85%) of tourists used social media before visiting Digha. Photographs (35%) and videos (25%) emerged as the most influential forms of content. This indicates that visual representations on social media significantly contribute to shaping the image of Digha among potential visitors.

Sample Percentage Analysis (Stakeholders) (N = 50)

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Believe Social Media Increased Tourist Arrivals	42	84%
Do Not Believe So	8	16%
Facebook Most Effective	18	36%
Instagram Most Effective	12	24%
YouTube Most Effective	10	20%
Travel Websites	7	14%
Others	3	6%



Most stakeholders (84%) believe that social media has increased tourist arrivals in Digha. Facebook remains the most influential platform, followed by Instagram and YouTube. The findings suggest that social media plays a crucial role in destination promotion and business growth in coastal tourism.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study aimed to analyse the impact of social media in shaping the image of coastal tourism in Digha, West Bengal. The qualitative analysis revealed that Digha occupies a dominant position among the coastal tourism destinations of West Bengal due to its developed infrastructure, accessibility, and wide range of tourist attractions. Compared to Mandarmani, Tajpur, and Shankarpur, Digha enjoys greater visibility and popularity among tourists. The primary data collected from 100 tourists indicate that social media plays a significant role in influencing travel decisions and destination image. A large majority of respondents (85%) reported using social media before visiting Digha, while only 15% did not rely on social media sources. Among the various forms of content, photographs (35%) emerged as the most influential factor, followed by videos (25%), reviews (20%), blogs (12%), and friends' posts (8%). These findings suggest that visual content has a stronger impact on shaping tourists' perceptions and expectations regarding coastal destinations. The responses from tourism stakeholders further support these findings. Out of 50 stakeholders surveyed, 84% believed that social media has contributed to an increase in tourist arrivals in Digha, while only 16% disagreed. Facebook was identified as the most effective platform (36%), followed by Instagram (24%), YouTube (20%), travel websites (14%), and other platforms (6%). These results indicate that social media has become an important promotional tool for tourism businesses and destination marketing activities. So the study concludes that social media has emerged as a powerful medium in shaping the image and development of coastal tourism in Digha, West Bengal. The findings demonstrate that tourists increasingly rely on social media platforms for information, destination awareness, and travel planning. Visual content such as photographs and videos significantly influences tourists' perceptions and motivates them to visit coastal destinations. The study also reveals that tourism stakeholders perceive social media as an effective mechanism for increasing tourist arrivals, enhancing destination visibility, and supporting local businesses. Platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube contribute substantially to destination branding and tourism promotion. And the research confirms that social media has positively influenced the image of Digha as a coastal tourism destination and has contributed to its continued growth and popularity. Therefore, the objective of the study—to analyse the impact of social media in shaping the image of coastal tourism in Digha, West Bengal—has been achieved. The findings suggest that effective utilization of social media can further strengthen destination branding, tourist engagement, and sustainable tourism development in Digha and other coastal destinations of West Bengal.

REFERENCES

- Bagri, S. C. (2003). *Trends in tourism promotion: Emerging issues*. New Delhi, India: Himalayan Publishing House.
- Bagri, S. C. (2006). *Sustainable tourism planning and development*. New Delhi, India: Kanishka Publishers.
- Bagri, S. C., Mahar, S. S., & Uniyal, S. (2013). *Tourism and hospitality industry: Applications and role of science and technology*. New Delhi, India: Apple Academic Press.
- Bhatia, A. K. (2011). *Tourism development: Principles and practices* (2nd ed.). New Delhi, India: Sterling Publishers.
- Buhalis, D., & Law, R. (2008). Progress in information technology and tourism management: 20 years on and 10 years after the Internet—The state of eTourism research. *Tourism Management*, 29(4), 609–623.
- Hudson, S., & Thal, K. (2013). The impact of social media on the consumer decision process: Implications for tourism marketing. *Journal of Travel & Tourism Marketing*, 30(1–2), 156–160.
- Kaplan, A. M., & Haenlein, M. (2010). Users of the world, unite! The challenges and opportunities of social media. *Business Horizons*, 53(1), 59–68.
- Leung, D., Law, R., Van Hoof, H., & Buhalis, D. (2013). Social media in tourism and hospitality: A literature review. *Journal of Travel & Tourism Marketing*, 30(1–2), 3–22.
- Mondal, S., & Sen, J. (2017). A framework of predictive analysis of tourist inflow in the beaches of West Bengal: A study of Digha–Mandarmani beach. *International Journal of Advanced Research in Computer Science*, 8(2), 425–430.
- Xiang, Z., & Gretzel, U. (2010). Role of social media in online travel information search. *Tourism Management*, 31(2), 179–188.
- Note:** If your university requires only sources published up to **2015**, you should exclude **Mondal and Sen (2017)** from the final reference list and use it only for background discussion, not for a study restricted to the period up to 2015.

