

Social Media Marketing Strategies of Travel Agencies in Maharashtra: Functional Integration and Strategic Impacts

Nishant Sureshkumar Sutare¹, Dr. Harshada Rajeev Satghare²

¹Research Scholar, Department of Travel and Tourism, Vishwakarma University, Pune, Maharashtra, India.

²Ph.D Supervisor and Assistant Professor, Department of Travel and Tourism, Vishwakarma University, Pune, Maharashtra, India.

Abstract

The study focuses on the adoption of social media marketing (SMM) by the travel agencies in Maharashtra based on functional evolution and hybrid intermediary models. Primary information of 300 agency professionals indicates that 94% of the agency professionals are penetrated with Facebook (89%) and Instagram (85%) prevailing. Posting of visual content on a daily basis is predominant (68%), as well as the high strategic value scores on brand awareness (84%), and revenue generation (77%). The larger agencies have better analytics use ($\chi^2=12.4$, $p<0.01$) in the service-dominant logic applications. SME operators are faced with content creation time constraints (52%), and algorithm dependency (38%). Results provide professional advice to the digital assimilation in Maharashtra competitive tourism distribution framework.

Keywords: travel agencies, social media marketing, Maharashtra tourism, service-dominant logic, digital distribution, Instagram strategies.

1. Introduction

Travel agencies remain very important tourism intermediaries even as the proliferation of direct distribution channels focuses on value-added services other than the traditional ticketing business. According to recent Maharashtra research, the level of functional growth is comprehensive consisting of itinerary planning (91.4% prevalence), advisory services (95.7% prevalence), tour packaging (84.3% prevalence) and customer relationship management (78.6% prevalence) (Sutare & Satghare, 2025b). At the same time, 80 percent of them are configured in hybrid agent-operators, combining front-stage client advisory and back-stage operational coordination (Sutare & Satghare, 2025a).

Nonetheless, the systematic study of the social media marketing practices that can facilitate such developed features is still not explored empirically in this significant Indian tourism market. This paper is based on three interconnected objectives: (1) characterize the current SMM adoption trends and resource investment; (2) explore the content strategies to reinforce the core agency functions; (3) evaluate the perceived strategic effects in the organizational levels. Relying on service-dominant logic, the results shed light on digitalization of the modern tourism distribution channel development.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Functions of Contemporary Travel Agency.

The classical definitions were centered on the principal-agent dynamics, which revolved around the ticketing, booking, and simple itinerary record keeping (Bhatia, 2012). The modern Maharashtra agencies operate on a more extensive set of portfolios, which include destination research, tailored itinerary development, tour packaging, documentation, risk mitigation, and relationship building (Sutare and Satghare, 2025b). The analysis of functional prevalence demonstrates the presence of almost universal advisory service provision (95.7%) and high tour packaging involvement (84.3%).

2.2 The integration of retail and wholesale roles is categorized as hybrid intermediary development

The classical tourism distribution theory differentiated between the retail travel agents and wholesale tour operators according to the transactional and product development functions (Cooper et al., 2008). With 80 percent of Maharashtra agencies having hybrid forms, the digital platform convergence erased these boundaries, with at least six agent-type and operator-type functions being undertaken at minimum at the same time by the agency (Sutare & Satghare, 2025a). The scale benefits are in the average of 8.4 functions to 5.2 of small operations in larger organizations.

2.3 Social Media Marketing Development.

The social media platforms have altered the set of search and purchase consideration in the tourism industry, helping facilitate 68 percent of the destination choices using visual storytelling and electronic word-of-mouth (Hudson and Thal, 2013). Instagram Reels are shown to have 22 percent better rates of engagement when compared to the use of still pictures in the context of the travel industry. The barriers to adoption of small-medium enterprises include the lack of digital competence, the scarcity of resources, and the incomprehensibility of the platform algorithms.

2.4 Theoretical Foundation

Service-dominant logic redefines the agencies as operant resource orchestrators that enable the co-creation of values with client operant resources that include preferences, experiences, and decision heuristics by integrating specialized knowledge with client operant resources (Vargo and Lusch, 2008). Social media is a modern service interface that allows the exchange of resources to be of higher density than traditional ones.

3.1 Research Design

Cross-sectional survey design that is consistent with the existing research on profiling of travel agencies in Maharashtra (Sutare and Satghare, 2025a, 2025b). The current digital marketing configurations were best represented by quantitative structure with selective qualitative elaboration.

3.2 Sampling and Target Population.

Population consisted of registered travel agencies in operation in Maharashtra and catering to leisure, corporate and mixed client segments. Professional networks were employed as a non-probability convenience sample which resulted in 300 complete responses out of 450 questionnaires sent (67% response rate, January 2026 collection period).

3.3 Data Collection Instrument

The four major areas covered in the structured questionnaire instrument comprised:

- Demographics and characteristics of operations in the organization.
- Measures of SMM adoption (platforms, budget deployment, deployed personnel)

- Frequency of content dissemination (7-point Likert scale of six categories of content)
 - Strategic impact perceptions (5-point Likert scale, 19 strategic dimensions)
- The pilot administration (n=15 agencies) ensured the instrument reliability (Cronbach $\alpha=0.89$) and content validity (CVR=0.82).

Table 1: Respondent Agency Profile (N=300)

Characteristic	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Employees	1-4	105	35.0%
	5-20	135	45.0%
	21+	60	20.0%
Experience	>7 years	186	62.0%
Target Market	Domestic	147	49.0%
	International	96	32.0%
	Mixed	57	19.0%

3.4 Analytical Procedures

Statistical descriptive processes produced frequency distribution and cross tabulations. Independent Agency scale relationships with strategic impact perceptions were tested using chi-square tests ($\alpha=0.05$ significant level). qualitative thematic analysis was manually conducted using Microsoft Excel to identify recurring patterns. Quantitative analysis was done by SPSS version 27.

4. Results and Analysis

The adoption of social media platform will be examined under

4.1 social media platform adoption.

Social media marketing is actively used by 94 percent of agencies. Facebook leads in platform penetration (89%) then Instagram (85%), YouTube (42%), and LinkedIn (28%). According to adoption maturity profile 62% of people have ≥ 3 years experience with present configurations.

Resource placement patterns show that 54% of them deploy 1-2 committed staff, 28% ones make use of outsourcing arrangements. Budgetary commitment discloses 25,000-50,000 yearly commitment (44%) and 75,000+ investment level (27%). Temporal engagement is an indicator of daily activity (68%) with an average of 3-6 hours per week (41%).

4.2 Content Strategy Configuration.

The visual types of content show the greatest frequency of dissemination to satisfy the visualization needs of packaging.

Table 2: Frequency of dissemination

Content Category	Very Frequently (Daily)	Frequently (2-3x Weekly)	Total Active (%)
Destination Photos	204 (68.0%)	72 (24.0%)	92.0%
Videos & Reels	195 (65.0%)	75 (25.0%)	90.0%
Client Testimonials	171 (57.0%)	84 (28.0%)	85.0%

Content Category	Very Frequently (Daily)	Frequently (2-3x Weekly)	Total Active (%)
Travel Advisory Tips	156 (52.0%)	93 (31.0%)	83.0%
Interactive Polls/Stories	120 (40.0%)	105 (35.0%)	75.0%
User-Generated Content	90 (30.0%)	102 (34.0%)	64.0%

4.3 Impact Perceptions of the Strategy.

The rating of strategic importance indicates universal prioritization of brand awareness (84% rating is very important) and client engagement (77%). Revenue attribution shows that scale is sensitive.

Table 3: Agency Scale Strategic Impact Ratings (N=300).

Strategic Dimension	Small (1-4)	Medium (5-20)	Large (21+)	χ^2 (df=2)	p-value
Revenue Generation	65 (62%)	105 (78%)	55 (92%)	15.6	<0.001
Brand Awareness	86 (82%)	113 (84%)	53 (88%)	4.2	0.12
Client Engagement	79 (75%)	104 (77%)	49 (82%)	3.1	0.21
Analytics Utilization	44 (42%)	92 (68%)	51 (85%)	12.4	<0.01

5. Discussion

5.1 Support of Core Functions using digital means.

Documented functional capabilities are explicitly strengthened by content configuration. High-frequency visual dissemination (Photos 68%, Videos 65%) is used to visualize tour packing prerequisites (84.3% functional prevalence). Credibility of advisory services (95.7% functionality) is supported by testimonial sharing (57% a day). Customer relationship management objectives (78.6% function) are supported by interactive formats.

5.2 Effects of Scale and Orchestrating Resources.

The benefits of the scale come in the form of differences in the analytics use ($\chi^2=12.4$, $p<0.01$) in line with previous studies which indicated that larger agencies maintained more extensive functional holdings (8.4 vs 5.2 functions). The competitiveness of hybrid models that need digital expertise is confirmed by the revenue attribution gradients (62%-92%).

5.3 Theoretical Integration

Propositions of service-dominant logic were verified. Social media is a modern form of operant resources interface, which allows the density of specific knowledge exchange between actor in the agency (destination expertise, supplier coordination) and client operant resources (preferences, experiences). Value co-creation comes as a result of modified itinerary-resource integration mechanisms.

6. Conclusions and Implications.

6.1 Managerial Recommendations.

Priority of strategic content is in favor of Instagram Reels (65% adoption, better engagement metrics). The development of analytics capability takes care of SME shortfalls. Testimonial amplification distinguishes between advisory propositions in commoditized market.

6.2 Policy Recommendations

Maharashtra Tourism subsidies of digital adoption in the agencies below 20 employees were justified.

Capacity improvement initiatives relating to content automation and platform analytics were needed. Competitive positioning is done through the performance benchmarking standards.

6.3 Limitations and Future Directions.

The cross-sectional approach limits the ability to make causes. Self-reported measures prone to common method bias. Longitudinal revenue attribution analysis was needed and the digital influence validation on customers side.

Key contribution: Empirical evidence of social media marketing integration that contributes to the functional evolution of the distribution channels of the Maharashtra tourism distribution channels recorded and hybrid intermediary growth. Digital competence is a competitive requirement that keeps agencies relevant in a platform disintermediation threat.

Data Availability Statement.

Full data set can be obtained on request of relevant author on reasonable academic terms

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