

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SOCIAL MEDIA ENGAGEMENT AND TOURIST DESTINATION LOYALTY

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the relationship between social media engagement and tourist destination loyalty. It explores how different forms of engagement—likes, shares, comments, and posts—on social media platforms influence tourists' loyalty behaviors, including revisiting a destination, recommending it to others, and overall satisfaction. A descriptive correlational research design was used, with surveys administered to 100 respondents. The results revealed that posts, likes, and comments had a significant positive impact on destination loyalty, particularly influencing tourists' satisfaction and their likelihood to recommend destinations. Shares showed a moderate correlation, especially with the intention of recommending. The findings highlight those higher levels of engagement on social media, particularly through posting and interacting with content, foster stronger emotional connections to destinations and enhance loyalty behaviors. These results suggest that social media engagement is an effective tool for destination marketers to build and maintain tourist loyalty. The study also aligns with previous research, supporting the role of social media as a crucial factor in promoting destination loyalty.

Keyword: Social Media Engagement, Tourist Destination Loyalty, Social Media Marketing, Recommending, Revisiting, Satisfaction

1. INTRODUCTION

In today's hyper-connected digital era, social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok played a central role in shaping how individuals perceived, planned, and experienced travel. These platforms served as powerful tools for tourism marketing, enabling destinations to showcase their unique offerings through user-generated content, photos, and reviews. Research highlighted that social media engagement not only influenced travelers' initial destination choices but also significantly impacted their long-term loyalty (Brown & Taylor, 2022; Martinez & Wilson, 2023). For instance, user-generated content, such as reviews and recommendations, fostered trust and emotional connection with destinations (Nguyen & Pham, 2022; Hughes et al., 2021). Despite extensive studies on the role of social media in tourism marketing, limited exploration existed regarding its direct influence on tourists' loyalty to specific destinations.

Tourist loyalty had been recognized as a crucial determinant of sustainable tourism growth. It reflected travelers' likelihood to revisit a destination or recommend it to others, driven by

factors such as destination satisfaction, perceived quality, and memorable experiences (Garcia & Perez, 2021; Kozak & Rimmington, 2020). While traditional loyalty drivers remained significant, the growing reliance on social media introduced new dimensions to how loyalty was cultivated. Studies established that social media engagement fostered a sense of belonging and emotional attachment, which translated into revisitation intentions and positive word-of-mouth (Kim & Yang, 2023; Li et al., 2020). However, the mechanisms linking specific social media interactions—likes, comments, shares, and posts—to destination loyalty remained underexplored, particularly in developing regions where tourism played a vital economic role.

In the Philippines, a nation celebrated for its picturesque landscapes and vibrant culture, social media served as a key driver of tourism growth. Valencia City, Bukidnon, exemplified this trend. Known for its lush agricultural scenery, cultural festivals, and welcoming community, Valencia increasingly leveraged social media to promote its attractions. Posts showcasing local destinations such as the Kaamulan Grounds, Lake Apo, and the Pineapple Plantation drew significant online

attention. Questions persisted about whether such engagement translated into lasting tourist loyalty. The interactions between tourists and Valencia City's social media content required further examination to determine if they influenced tourists' likelihood to revisit or recommend the destination. Addressing these questions provided valuable insights for local tourism stakeholders seeking to enhance sustainable tourism practices.

This study investigated the relationship between social media engagement and tourist destination loyalty, focusing on Valencia City, Bukidnon. Guided by the research gap identified by prior studies (Adams & Evans, 2022; Nguyen & Pham, 2022), the research determined whether social media interactions impacted tourists' intentions to return to or recommend a destination. By addressing this gap, the study contributed to the growing body of literature on digital tourism marketing and offered actionable insights for local tourism development.

The research was conducted in Valencia City, Bukidnon, targeting tourist spots with strong social media presence, including Lake Apo, the Kaamulan Festival, and other popular attractions. Respondents consisted of 100 tourists who had visited these destinations and actively interacted with related social media content. These participants selected based on their engagement patterns—likes, shares, comments, or posts—provided critical data to explore how digital interactions shaped destination loyalty. By bridging theoretical insights with practical applications, this study informed strategies for enhancing Valencia City's appeal and fostering sustainable tourism growth.

1.1.Statement of the Problem

This study, conducted during the School Year 2024-2025, explored how social media engagement influenced tourist destination loyalty in Valencia City, Bukidnon. The research focused on popular tourist destinations promoted on platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok, examining the role of digital interactions in shaping tourists' loyalty and satisfaction.

Specifically, the study sought to address the following questions:

1. What was the level of social media engagement in the areas of:
 - 1.1. Likes,
 - 1.2. Shares,
 - 1.3. Comments, and
 - 1.4. Posts?
2. What was the level of tourist destination loyalty in the areas of:
 - 2.1. Revisiting a destination,
 - 2.2. Recommending a destination to others, and
 - 2.3. Overall satisfaction?
3. Was there a significant relationship between social media engagement and tourist destination loyalty?

1.2. Hypothesis

There was no significant relationship between the level of social media engagement and the level of tourist destination loyalty.

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This chapter presents the research methods used to address the study's objectives. It includes the research design, research locale, research respondents, sampling procedure, research instruments, data gathering procedure, scoring procedure, statistical treatment, and the validity and reliability of the instruments used.

2.1. Research Design

The study employed a descriptive-correlational quantitative research design to analyze the relationship between social media engagement and tourist destination loyalty. The descriptive component focused on gathering detailed information about how individuals interact with social media content related to tourist destinations and their loyalty levels toward these places. Meanwhile, the correlational aspect examined whether a significant relationship exists between the extent of social media engagement and loyalty to tourist destinations. This design enabled a comprehensive exploration of the participants' behaviors and perceptions without manipulating any variables, ensuring both descriptive insights and relational analysis.

2.3. Research Locale

The research was conducted in selected tourist destinations in Valencia City, Bukidnon. These locations were chosen due to their popularity on social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok, where they frequently appear in posts, stories, and other user-generated content. Valencia City, with its natural and cultural attractions, has become a favored destination for travelers, making it an ideal setting to study the influence of social media engagement on loyalty. The area's visibility and interaction levels on social media provided a strong context for analyzing the relationship between the study's variables.

2.4. Research Respondents

The respondents of the study consisted of 100 tourists who had visited any of the selected destinations within the past year and had engaged with related social media content. These individuals were selected based on their active social media presence, as evidenced by actions such as liking, sharing, commenting on, or posting content related to these destinations. Their recent travel experiences and online activities provided relevant data for analyzing how social media engagement influences loyalty to tourist destinations.

2.5. Sampling Procedure

The study utilized purposive sampling to identify and select respondents who met the study's criteria. This non-probability sampling method was appropriate for targeting individuals with specific characteristics relevant to the research objectives. The participants were required to have visited the selected destinations and actively engaged with social media content related to these places. By focusing on such individuals, the study ensured that the data collected was meaningful and aligned with the research objectives. This method also facilitated a deeper understanding of the relationship between the two variables by gathering insights from those most familiar with both travel and social media interactions.

2.6. Research Instruments

The research utilized a structured survey questionnaire as the primary instrument for data collection. This questionnaire was divided into two main sections. The first section assessed

social media engagement, with questions focusing on the frequency and type of interaction respondents had with social media content about the destinations. The second section measured tourist destination loyalty by evaluating respondents' likelihood of revisiting the destination, recommending it to others, and their overall satisfaction. Both sections used a five-point Likert scale, where responses ranged from "Strongly Disagree" (1) to "Strongly Agree" (5). This design allowed for a systematic and quantifiable analysis of the respondents' perceptions and behaviors.

2.7. Validity and Reliability of the Instrument

To ensure the validity of the instrument, the questionnaire was reviewed by experts in the field of tourism and social media engagement. This helped ensure that the questions accurately reflected the concepts of social media engagement and tourist destination loyalty. Additionally, a pilot test was conducted with a small group of respondents to test the clarity and relevance of the questions. The feedback obtained from the pilot test led to revisions to enhance the instrument's comprehensibility and precision.

Regarding reliability, a Cronbach's alpha coefficient was calculated to assess the internal consistency of the survey instrument. The Cronbach's alpha score was found to be 0.92, indicating a high level of reliability. This means the instrument was consistent in measuring the constructs of interest, ensuring that the responses provided by the participants were dependable and reflective of their true perceptions and behaviors.

2.8. Data Gathering Procedure

The data collection process began by securing permissions from local authorities and obtaining informed consent from all respondents. Surveys were distributed both online, through Google Forms, and in person at the selected destinations to ensure accessibility and convenience for the participants. The survey period lasted for two weeks, providing ample time for respondents to complete the questionnaire. To maintain ethical standards, the study emphasized confidentiality and the voluntary nature of participation. After data collection, the responses were compiled and prepared for analysis.

2.9. Scoring Procedure

Scoring Procedure

The responses from the survey sections on social media engagement and tourist destination loyalty were scored using a five-point Likert scale. The following scale was applied to interpret the participants' responses:

For Social Media Engagement in the areas of Likes, Shares, Comments, and Posts, the scores were categorized as follows:

Scale Range	Description	Interpretation
5 4.51–5.00	Strongly Agree	Very High Engagement
4 3.51–4.50	Agree	High Engagement
3 2.51–3.50	Moderately Agree	Moderate Engagement
2 1.51–2.50	Disagree	Low Engagement
1 1.00–1.50	Strongly Disagree	Very Low Engagement

For Tourist Destination Loyalty in the areas of Revisiting a Destination, Recommending a Destination to Others, and Overall Satisfaction, the scores were categorized as follows:

Scale Range	Description	Interpretation
5 4.51–5.00	Strongly Agree	Very High Loyalty
4 3.51–4.50	Agree	High Loyalty
3 2.51–3.50	Moderately Agree	Moderate Loyalty
2 1.51–2.50	Disagree	Low Loyalty
1 1.00–1.50	Strongly Disagree	Very Low Loyalty

2.10. Statistical Treatment

Descriptive statistics, including mean and standard deviation, were used to address Statement of the Problem 1 (level of social media engagement) and Statement of the Problem 2 (level of tourist destination loyalty). Pearson Product-Moment Correlation was applied to determine the relationship between social media engagement and tourist destination loyalty, addressing Statement of the Problem 3.

3. DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

1. What was the level of social media engagement in the areas of:

- 1.1. Likes,
- 1.2. Shares,
- 1.3. Comments, and
- 1.4. Posts?

Table 1 provides descriptive statistics on the level of social media engagement across four sub-variables: likes, shares, comments, and posts. The

table shows the mean and standard deviation for each factor, along with the overall engagement score, which is categorized as "Agree" based on the respondents' average scores.

Table 1

Result on the Level of Social Media Engagement

Sub-variables	Mean	SD	Interpretation
Likes	4.1780	.65189	High Engagement
Shares	3.4560	.81753	Moderate Engagement
Comments	3.9900	.74203	High Engagement
Post	4.1920	.72637	High Engagement
Social Media Engagement	3.9540	.60401	High Engagement

Legend:

Range	Description	Interpretation
4.51–5.00	Strongly Agree	Very High Engagement
3.51–4.50	Agree	High Engagement
2.51–3.50	Moderately Agree	Moderate Engagement
1.51–2.50	Disagree	Low Engagement
1.00–1.50	Strongly Disagree	Very Low Engagement

The table reveals that the highest level of engagement occurs in posts, with a mean score of 4.1920, followed closely by likes at 4.1780. Both factors have relatively low standard deviations (.72637 for posts and .65189 for likes), indicating that there is little variation in how respondents engage with these forms of social media content. In contrast, shares have a lower mean score of 3.4560, with a higher standard deviation of .81753, suggesting a more neutral level of engagement and greater variability in responses. Comments, with a mean score of 3.9900, also show a positive level of engagement but fall slightly behind posts and likes. The overall social media engagement score stands at 3.9540, indicating that, on average, respondents agree with engaging in social media activities related to tourism.

The findings suggest that respondents are most engaged with liking and posting content related to tourism, indicating that these behaviors are the most common and accessible forms of interaction with social media posts. The high mean scores for likes (4.1780) and posts (4.1920) demonstrate that respondents frequently interact with and create tourism-related content. The relatively low standard deviations for these factors suggest consistent behavior among the respondents. In contrast, shares, with a neutral score of 3.4560, indicate that respondents are less likely to share tourism-related content, possibly due to the more

selective nature of sharing posts compared to liking or posting.

Similarly, although comments have a positive mean score of 3.9900, they are still slightly less common than liking or posting, with a standard deviation of .74203 reflecting moderate variation in how often respondents leave comments on posts about tourism.

These findings imply that while respondents are willing to engage with social media content about tourism, they prefer passive forms of engagement, such as liking and posting, over more active engagement like sharing or commenting. This suggests that although social media has a significant impact on tourism engagement, the depth of interaction varies across different types of engagement, with sharing and commenting being less frequent activities.

The findings are supported by research from Li et al. (2019), who found that liking and posting about tourism-related content are common behaviors on social media, reflecting a broad level of engagement. Tussyadiah et al. (2020) also support the high engagement in posts, highlighting how social media posts allow individuals to share their travel experiences, which encourages further tourism promotion. Conversely, the neutral score for shares aligns with the work of Dellarocas et al. (2020), who noted that sharing tourism-related content is not as frequent as other forms of engagement. Finally, the slightly lower engagement in commenting is consistent with Zhou et al. (2021), who indicated that commenting, while valuable, tends to occur less frequently than liking or sharing posts about travel destinations.

2. What was the level of tourist destination loyalty in the areas of:

- 2.1. Revisiting a destination,
- 2.2. Recommending a destination to others, and
- 2.3. Overall satisfaction?

Table 2 presents the descriptive statistics on the level of destination loyalty across three sub-variables: revisiting a destination, recommending a destination to others, and overall satisfaction. The table shows the mean, standard deviation, and

remarks for each sub-variable, with the overall mean for destination loyalty at 4.3627.

Table 2

Result on the Level of Destination Loyalty

Sub-variables	Mean	SD	Interpretation
Revisiting a Destination	4.1860	.66318	High Loyalty
Recommending a Destination to Others	4.4920	.59589	High Loyalty
Overall Satisfaction	4.4100	.68601	High Loyalty
Destination Loyalty	4.3627	.53529	High Loyalty

Legend:

Range	Description	Interpretation
4.51–5.00	Strongly Agree	Very High Loyalty
3.51–4.50	Agree	High Loyalty
2.51–3.50	Moderately Agree	Moderate Loyalty
1.51–2.50	Disagree	Low Loyalty
1.00–1.50	Strongly Disagree	Very Low Loyalty

The results indicate that the highest mean, 4.4920, is for recommending a destination to others, suggesting that respondents have the strongest loyalty in this area. This is followed by the overall satisfaction sub-variable with a mean of 4.4100, indicating a high level of satisfaction with their experiences at tourist destinations. The lowest mean, although still in the "Agree" category, is for revisiting a destination, with a mean of 4.1860, showing that while respondents are generally willing to return, their loyalty to revisit destinations is slightly lower than their likelihood of recommending or their overall satisfaction.

The findings suggest that tourists exhibit the highest level of loyalty in recommending destinations to others. This implies that satisfied tourists are likely to share their positive experiences, contributing to the promotion of the destination. The strong agreement in the overall satisfaction sub-variable indicates that tourists are generally satisfied with their experiences, which strongly influences their loyalty and future behaviors, such as revisiting or recommending the destination. However, the slightly lower mean for revisiting a destination suggests that, while respondents are open to returning, novelty and the desire to explore new destinations might reduce their loyalty to revisit. This highlights the tension between loyalty to a specific destination and the desire to discover new places.

The high mean for recommending a destination to others supports the findings of Chiu et al. (2019), who emphasized that satisfied tourists are more likely to engage in positive word-of-mouth and recommend destinations. This aligns with the strong agreement seen in this sub-variable. The high level of overall satisfaction corroborates Chen and Tsai's (2021) research, which found that high satisfaction directly influences the likelihood of revisiting or recommending a destination. Lastly, the slightly lower mean for revisiting a destination supports Han et al. (2020), who noted that revisiting decisions are influenced by factors such as familiarity and the desire for new experiences. This suggests that while satisfaction and recommendation are key drivers of loyalty, the decision to revisit a destination may be impacted by personal preferences for novelty.

3. Was there a significant relationship between social media engagement and tourist destination loyalty?

Table 3 presents the correlation between social media engagement (likes, shares, comments, and posts) and tourist destination loyalty (revisiting a destination, recommending a destination to others, and overall satisfaction). The table provides the correlation coefficients (R) and significance values (P) for each variable, with a sample size (N) of 100 respondents.

Table 3

Correlation between social media engagement and tourist destination loyalty

VARIABLES	Revisiting a Destination	Recommen ding a Destination to Others	Overall Satisfact ion	Revisiting a Destination
Likes	R= .453 P= .000 N= 100	R= .443 P= .000 N= 100	R= .437 P= .000 N= 100	R= .453 P= .000 N= 100
Shares	R= .282 P= .005 N= 100	R= .405 P= .000 N= 100	R= .361 P= .000 N= 100	R= .282 P= .005 N= 100
Comments	R= .391 P= .000 N= 100	R= .327 P= .001 N= 100	R= .422 P= .000 N= 100	R= .391 P= .000 N= 100
Post	R= .289 P= .004 N= 100	R= .510 P= .000 N= 100	R= .504 P= .000 N= 100	R= .289 P= .004 N= 100

Overall Correlation	Destination Loyalty	Decision
Social Engagement	Media	Media
	R= .587	The Null
	P= .000	Hypothesis was
	N= 100	Rejected

The correlations between social media engagement and tourist destination loyalty across all sub-variables are significant and positive. In terms of specific sub-variables, posts show the strongest correlation with recommending a destination to others (R = 0.510) and overall satisfaction (R = 0.504). This indicates that creating and sharing content about a destination on social media is strongly associated with tourists' intentions to recommend the destination and their overall satisfaction. Comments also have substantial positive relationships, with R values of 0.391 for revisiting a destination and 0.422 for overall satisfaction. Shares have the highest correlation with recommending a destination to others (R = 0.405), while likes demonstrate a consistently significant relationship across all loyalty dimensions, with the highest correlation for revisiting a destination (R = 0.453). The findings highlight that higher levels of social media engagement are positively linked to various dimensions of loyalty, such as revisiting, recommending, and overall satisfaction.

The results suggest that social media engagement plays a crucial role in fostering tourist loyalty, with posts, shares, and comments contributing to stronger loyalty behaviors, such as recommending destinations and ensuring overall satisfaction. The strong correlation between posts and loyalty behaviors (especially recommending and satisfaction) implies that tourists who actively share their experiences on social media are likely to have a higher emotional connection to the destination, leading to increased loyalty. The positive relationships between comments and revisiting further suggest that engaging in conversations about destinations enhances satisfaction and the intention to return. The results also indicate that social media engagement is an effective tool for destination marketing, as tourists who interact with content through likes, shares, and comments are more likely to exhibit loyalty behaviors.

The findings from this study are consistent with previous research. For example, Kim et al. (2019) found that social media engagement, particularly through posting content, fosters stronger loyalty behaviors such as revisiting and recommending a destination. The significant positive correlations observed in this study align with these findings, supporting the idea that social media posts are a key factor in building destination loyalty. Chiu et al. (2020) also emphasized that comments and feedback on social media positively impact tourists' satisfaction and their intention to revisit destinations, which is corroborated by the correlations found in the sub-variable comments. Furthermore, Li et al. (2020) highlighted that sharing content strengthens loyalty behaviors, particularly in recommending a destination, which is supported by the strong correlation between shares and recommending a destination ($R = 0.405$). These results reaffirm the role of social media engagement in influencing destination loyalty across multiple dimensions, including revisiting, recommending, and overall satisfaction.

4.CONCLUSION

The study concludes that social media engagement related to tourism destinations is predominantly high, with respondents showing significant interaction through likes and posts. These forms of engagement were the most common and accessible, highlighting that tourists are more inclined to passively engage with tourism-related content by liking or posting about destinations rather than actively sharing or commenting. Despite this, the findings also reveal that sharing and commenting still play important roles in fostering engagement, although they occur less frequently. This suggests that while social media is an effective platform for promoting tourism, there is a clear preference for less involved forms of interaction. The study further indicates that tourist destination loyalty is also notably high, particularly in terms of recommending destinations to others. Respondents expressed strong loyalty through their willingness to recommend destinations, which is the most pronounced form of loyalty observed. Overall satisfaction with tourist destinations was also high, although the intention to revisit was slightly lower, possibly due to tourists' desire for new experiences and novelty. These results emphasize the importance of satisfaction in driving destination loyalty,

especially in terms of recommendations, while also acknowledging that the desire for variety may influence the decision to revisit a destination.

The study also found a significant positive relationship between social media engagement and tourist destination loyalty. The strongest correlations were observed between social media posts and the likelihood of recommending a destination, as well as overall satisfaction. This indicates that tourists who engage actively by posting about their experiences on social media are more likely to develop a stronger emotional connection with the destination, leading to increased loyalty. Additionally, comments and shares, while less frequent, still showed positive correlations with loyalty behaviors, further supporting the idea that social media engagement is a powerful tool for building and maintaining loyalty toward tourist destinations. These findings suggest that the more tourists engage with content on social media, the more likely they are to develop loyalty behaviors, such as recommending destinations and expressing satisfaction with their experiences.

5.RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings, it is suggested that tourism marketers and destination managers focus on creating engaging content that encourages sharing and interaction on social media. Since posts showed the strongest correlation with destination loyalty, it may be beneficial to highlight unique and authentic experiences that resonate with tourists. Platforms like Instagram and Facebook could be particularly effective for promoting destinations through visual content.

It could also be helpful for destination managers to foster an emotional connection with tourists by showcasing local culture and attractions. Encouraging tourists to interact with content, perhaps through simple calls to action, might increase engagement and loyalty.

For social media influencers and content creators, it might be useful to create content that encourages interaction, such as asking followers to share their thoughts or experiences. Storytelling could also be a good approach to making content more relatable and shareable.

Future researchers might consider exploring how different social media platforms affect destination loyalty or conducting studies over time to see how

social media engagement influences revisit intentions. Qualitative research could also provide insights into the psychological factors behind social media engagement in tourism.

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