

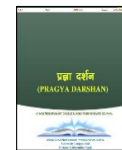


NEPALESE TOURISM PROMOTION PRACTICES AND ITS EFFECTS

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Abstract

The spectacular landscape and diverse, exotic ethnic groups and cultures in Nepal represent considerable potential for tourism, but growth in the tourism industry has been not satisfactory relative to similar tourist destination. Nepal has spent massively on tourism promotion; however, there is no proper measurement of its effectiveness. The objectives of this study are to examine tourism promotion activities by Nepal in today's digital age, to assess the effectiveness of the tourism promotion activities used to promote tourism in Nepal. This study is descriptive and analytical research design. This research based on survey of 401 tourism business operators. The study collected the perspectives of tourism business operators of Nepal on tourism promotion activities and their effectiveness. A survey of tourism operators revealed that website is the most effective way to increase awareness and create visits. WOM was most effective in creating revisits. This study also revealed, social media, tiktok, YouTube, Instagram, Facebook has replacing traditional promotional activities. Consumer survey on tourism promotion effectiveness could be done in future.

Keywords: tourism, promotion, awareness, visit, revisit

Introduction

Nepal has tremendous potential for tourism business. Nepal is diversified biologically, culturally, geographically. Mt. Everest and birthplace of Lord Buddha, Pasupatinath. Tourism business is large source of foreign exchange. Nepal is ranked among top destinations (tripadvisor.com, 2019; Lonely Planet, 2017; CNN, 2021; SKAL, 2019). Huge sum of money is being spent on tourism promotion for example major events like Visit Nepal 1998, Nepal tourism year 2011 and Visit Nepal 2020. Tourism contribute about 7% to Nepalese GDP, about 13 lakh Nepalese are employed in Tourism Industry in Nepal, that is 16% of total employment generation in Nepal. Tourism's linkage with other sectors of the economy enhances its overall impact. As Blyth (2003) succinctly defines, "promotion refers to communication in marketing." Promotion can be implemented through a variety of channels, including advertising, personal selling, sales promotion, direct marketing, publicity, and public relations (Kotler et al., 2021; Stanton et al., 2001). Studies by Akbar et al. (2008) emphasize the dual effect of advertising on sales—both immediate and long-term. They highlight the "carry-over" effect of advertising expenditures in brand recall and loyalty. Direct marketing focuses on establishing a personal and immediate relationship between producers and consumers, often bypassing intermediaries. As Elrod and Fortenberry (2020) explain, it involves direct message delivery through channels such as mail, telemarketing, door-to-door visits, email, text messages, radio, TV, and increasingly, social media marketing. Despite its strategic targeting, the response rate in direct marketing is typically low, and the likelihood of receiving meaningful feedback remains limited (Fill & Turnbull, 2016; Stone & Sharpley, 2008; Murthy, 2009).

A website is defined as a collection of interconnected web pages identified by a common domain name, hosted on one or more web servers, and accessible via the internet (Hasley & Gregg, 2010). Tourism has been among the foremost industries to adopt and benefit from the functionalities of the World Wide Web, leveraging the Internet and associated technologies for communication, promotion, and customer engagement (Wiweka & Arcana, 2019). The effectiveness of websites in generating tourism-related engagement and conversions depends significantly on their alignment with users' cognitive styles, motivations, and demographic factors such as age, gender, and location (Sun et al., 2017). In particular, Web 2.0 technologies, often referred to as the "social web," have transformed passive users into active content creators, emphasizing user-generated content (UGC), ease of interaction, and technological interoperability (Blank & Reisdorf, 2012). Social media are widely recognized as digital platforms that facilitate user interaction through the creation, exchange, and discussion of content, often rooted in individual experiences and perspectives (Liberato et al., 2018). These platforms are typically categorized into three main types: social networking sites (such as Facebook and LinkedIn), media-sharing platforms (like YouTube and Flickr), and thought-sharing spaces including blogs. As observed by Rodgers and Thorson

(2019), the use of social media has expanded rapidly over the past decade. Platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, YouTube, Tiktok and Twitter (X) now command a dominant share of media with user engagement.

WOM is typically defined as the exchange of information about a product or service that originates from consumers who are seen as independent from the company providing the offering, and that takes place through channels also perceived as free from corporate influence (Sen & Lerman, 2007). Because of this perceived impartiality, WOM is generally regarded as more credible and trustworthy than traditional advertising, making it a highly persuasive tool in the consumer decision-making process. Positive WOM has long been leveraged in marketing through strategies such as featuring satisfied tourists in promotional campaigns and encouraging referrals (Mittal, 1999). It can be generated through employee–customer relationships, well-executed public relations efforts, viral advertisements, and content that generates buzz (Zeithaml et al., 2011). The underlying strength of WOM lies in its perceived objectivity, where communicators are seen as having no commercial motivation to distort truth or exaggerate product qualities.

An endorsement refers to a clear and deliberate show of support for a product or service, typically made by an individual or group viewed as independent from the producing company. Such endorsers may include celebrities, influencers, athletes, experts, media reviewers, everyday users, as well as institutional bodies like professional associations, safety regulators, environmental agencies, and non-governmental organizations (Doyle, 2016; Govoni, 2003). Endorsements can be either paid or unpaid. Unpaid endorsements are usually voluntary and fall under the right to free speech, provided they are not defamatory. Paid endorsements, on the other hand, are governed by legal standards, particularly in the U.S., where the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) requires both the advertiser and endorser to disclose any financial or material relationships. A key difference exists between advertising and endorsement: while advertising promotes a product, endorsement serves as a form of public validation or approval—an important distinction in marketing strategy (Doyle, 2016; Govoni, 2003).

Haneef (2017) emphasizes that satisfaction with a current product plays an important role in shaping consumers' decisions about future purchases. In this way, satisfaction is not a one-time feeling but a dynamic emotional response that develops over time through repeated experiences. This idea is also supported by Anderson and Renault (2013), who describe satisfaction as “an affective state that is formed on the basis of an overall evaluation of a consumption experience over time.” Research consistently shows a strong positive link between perceived service quality and customer satisfaction. In tourism, for example, Song et al. (2012) found that when tourists view the quality of a destination as high, they are more likely to feel satisfied overall. Their study also pointed to a clear relationship between expectations and satisfaction: if tourists' expectations are carefully managed and met, their perception of performance tends to improve, leading to greater satisfaction. On the other hand, if expectations are set too high and not fulfilled, this can result in dissatisfaction. This highlights the importance of clear and realistic communication in tourism promotion. Tourist satisfaction and emotional attachment to destinations are recognized as vital factors influencing revisit intentions, expenditure levels, and destination loyalty. According to Neuvonen et al. (2010), “*perceptions of high-quality services and recreational environments were positively correlated with attachment to a region.*” The study further found that tourists who develop positive place attachment demonstrate a higher intention to revisit the same destination in the future. While some studies suggest that repeat visitors may spend less per visit compared to first-time tourists, emotionally attached and satisfied visitors often contribute more significantly to cumulative expenditures, particularly through repeat patronage and referrals. Such loyal visitors play an important role in supporting local enterprises by generating positive word-of-mouth, effectively enhancing destination image and promoting local tourism services.

A familiarization trip—often referred to as a “fam trip”—is a type of domestic inspection tour designed to introduce participants to tourism offerings that have the potential to be developed into marketable travel products. These trips are particularly important for showcasing key attractions, sightseeing destinations, and local experiences that may appeal to international visitors. According to the Nepal Tourism Board (NTB, 2023), such tours provide participants with firsthand information, support the development of affordable and practical travel packages, and are often accompanied by local opinion forums that promote dialogue and product development. Fam trips are typically organized for celebrities, journalists, and field experts, who serve as influential voices in public relations and tourism publicity. By experiencing destinations directly, these participants are better positioned to promote the region, either through media coverage, endorsements, or professional recommendations. As such, familiarization trips play a vital role in branding, awareness generation, and strategic destination marketing.

The foundational AIDA model (Attention, Interest, Desire, Action), attributed to Elias St. Elmo Lewis in the late 19th century, argues that effective promotional messages must first grab attention, arouse interest, generate desire, and then drive action (Kim et al., 2005; Sontakki, 2006; Strong, 1925). Another influential framework, DAGMAR—short for *Defining Advertising Goals for Measured Advertising Results*—was proposed by Colley (1961). This model suggests that advertising should move customers through a progression: from unawareness to awareness, comprehension, conviction, and ultimately, action. Similarly, Lavidge and Steiner (1961) presented the Hierarchy of Effects Model, which outlines a psychological progression from cognitive (awareness, knowledge), to affective (liking, preference), to conative (intention, purchase) stages. They argued that effective advertising integrates all three stages. As the saying goes, what is not measured cannot be managed, and this holds particularly true for tourism promotion. Evaluating promotional effectiveness is essential to determine whether it fulfills its intended goals. According to Awale et al. (2022), the effectiveness of a promotional activity is best assessed by analyzing how well it meets its objectives. In the conceptual framework of this study, independent variables are advertisement (AD), social media (SOL), websites (WEB), word of mouth (WOM), and endorsement (ENR). Dependent variables in this study are awareness (AWR), visit (VST), and revisit (RVT). (Aldebi, & Aljboory, 2017; Belch, 2014; Kunwar et al., 2022; Lavidge & Steiner, 1961).

Statement of the Problems

Growth in the tourism industry has not been satisfactory (NTB, 2023; Pandey 2008; Shrestha, 1998; UNWTO, 2017; WTTC, 2024). Most of the promotional effort are waste (Basnet, 2009; Shrestha, 1998). No proper measurement of promotional effectiveness. Data on tourist arrivals, tourists' length of stay and foreign exchange contributions available but, which has greatest contribution not clear. The effectiveness of a particular promotional tool is not known. Tourism enterprises are not clear on where to spend money for tourism promotion. Literature show relationship between tourism and economic growth are conflicting (Lionetti & Gonzalez, 2011). Nepal is ranked among top destinations by authorities but Nepal not been able to reap its fair share of benefits from tourism. No clear studies on the reason behind the lack of tourist inflow. There are lots of research on why Nepalese tourism is not so successful but what makes tourism promotion successful. (Bhatta, 1997; Infocus, 2023; Kuwar et al., 2022). Nepal lack research based tourism promotional programs (Pradhan, 2013; Shrestha, 1998; Basnet, 2009). Emerging tools like social media, digital marketing, AI use in tourism promotion is not clear. Only few studies have evaluated how tourist destination awareness increases future visit and revisit intentions (Ervinna & Octaviany, 2022). Studies done in different level of development, different climate/season, different country and in different period of time cannot be generalized. Must explore new avenues as digital and AI surge (Garcia et al., 2018; Jones et al., 2011; Heung, 2003).

Objectives of the Study

- To examine the current practices employed in Nepalese tourism promotion.
- To investigate the relationship between tourism promotion efforts and tourists' awareness, visits and revisits.
- To analyze the impact of tourism promotion on the performance of tourism businesses in Nepal.

Methodology of the Study

This study is descriptive and analytical research design. This is strategic study since this study tries to analyze tourism promotion strategies implied by tourism operators and which of them worked well for them. In this study perspectives of the tourism operators on promotion practices and its effectiveness were surveyed. Sample size of this study is 384, stratified and convenience sampling method used. All five dimensions of tourism 5As (Access, Accommodation, Amenities, Attraction, Activities) were covered. Data was collected for whole one year to cover all season. Likert scale was used. Structural Equation Modeling was applied. Descriptive analysis, confirmatory factor analysis, reliability, validity, correlation and regression tools were used for analysis.

Promotional effectiveness (awareness, visit, revisit) = function of (advertisement, social media, websites, word of mouth, endorsement)

$$Y_i = \alpha + \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 X_2 + \beta_3 X_3 + \beta_4 X_4 + \beta_5 X_5 + e_i$$

Findings and Discussion

Cronbach's alpha, Factor loading, Composite reliability, Average variance extraction, Triangulation of the study, independent sample t tests, ANOVA was done for reliability. HTMT ratio, Composite Reliability (CR), average variance extraction (AVE), maximum shared

squared variance (MSV), face validity, convergent validity, divergent validity tests, Bartlett's test, KMO test were applied in factor analysis. Questionnaire sets were checked and ranked by experts. The seven best items were identified on the basis of the average rank of each question. Pilot test was performed. This study consulted twenty-three senior professors and forty PhD holders for refinement and validity. In the questionnaire few questions were set in reverse tone to check the seriousness of the respondent when reading questionnaire, for validity of response, data. Reversed questions in the questionnaire were adjusted to similar tone when data entry was done.

Table 1

Respondents Profile

Age of the respondent	Frequency	Percent
Under 25	113	28
25 to 34	119	29.5
35 to 49	140	34.7
Above 50	31	7.7
Total	403	100
Gender of the respondent	Frequency	Percent
Male	288	71.5
Female	114	28.3
Others	1	0.2
Total	403	100
Education level of respondent	Frequency	Percent
School level	104	25.8
Bachelor level	172	42.6
Master's or above level	127	31.5
Total	403	100
Business of the respondent	Frequency	Percent
Hotel	111	27.5
Travel agency	75	18.6
Restaurant	71	17.6
Trekking	24	6
Mountaineering	15	3.7
Shop	76	18.8
Others	31	7.7
Total	403	100
Business established year	Frequency	Percent
1968 to 1999 AD	65	16.1
2000 to 2009	75	18.6
2010 to 2019	182	45.2
2020 to 2021	31	7.7
2022 to 2023	50	12.4
Total	403	100
Experiences of respondent	Frequency	Percent
Less than one year	78	19.4
One to five years	121	30
Five to ten years	88	21.8
More than ten years	116	28.8
Total	403	100

Number of employees	Frequency	Percent
Below 11	255	63.3
11 to 20	79	19.6
20 to 50	48	11.9
50 to 100	7	1.7
More than 100	14	3.5
Total	403	100
Location of business	Frequency	Percent
Kathmandu	372	92.3
Lalitpur	16	4
Bhaktapur	9	2.2
Out of Kathmandu valley	6	1.4
Total	403	100

Table 2

Structural Model Assessment (Path Analysis for Regression)

Hypothesized Relationship	Decision	Standardized Estimates	t value	p value	Status
AD -> AWR	Rejected	.001	.010	0.992	Insignificant.
WOM -> AWR	Accepted	.129	2.093	0.036	Significant.
ENR-> AWR	Rejected	.006	.087	0.931	Insignificant.
SOL -> AWR	Accepted	.122	2.113	0.035	Significant.
WES -> AWR	Accepted	.699	5.572	0.000	Significant.
Adjusted R-square		0.485			
AD -> VST	Accepted	0.199	2.804	0.005	Significant.
WOM -> VST	Accepted	0.205	3.671	0.000	Significant.
ENR-> VST	Accepted	0.179	2.964	0.003	Significant.
SOL -> VST	Accepted	0.179	3.445	0.000	Significant.
WES -> VST	Accepted	0.821	7.072	0.000	Significant.
Adjusted R-square		0.820			
AD -> RVT	Rejected	0.107	1.594	0.111	Insignificant.
WOM -> RVT	Accepted	0.458	6.436	0.000	Significant
ENR-> RVT	Rejected	0.114	1.926	0.054	insignificant

SOL -> RVT	Rejected	0.097	1.928	0.054	insignificant
WES -> RVT	Accepted	0.439	5.721	0.000	Significant
Adjusted R-square		0.437			

Studies have shown websites has the highest impact on tourist awareness about Nepal and tourist visits to Nepal. Tourist revisit is contributed most by WOM and secondly again website. This is obvious as internet has been the most popular medium of communication. People search in internet for nay information and they land into websites. Even social media are playing the role of websites. (Ayeh & Lin, 2011; Castaneda et al., 2007; Sun, 2017; Song et al., 2012; Tan & Chang, 2015; Veloutsou et al., 2004; Xia & Bechwati, 2008). WOM is testimonial therefore people trust. When people hear updates about Nepal form those who had visited Nepal they trust and visit Nepal again (Belch, 2014; Kotler et al., 2021; Stanton et al., 2001).

Table 3

Result of Hypothesis Testing

Hypotheses symbol	Hypotheses	Status
H1a	Advertisement has positive and significant impact on awareness.	Rejected
H1b	Word of mouth has positive and significant impact on awareness.	Accepted
H1c	Endorsement positive and significant impact on awareness.	Rejected
H1d	Social media has positive and significant on awareness.	Accepted
H1e	Website has positive and significant impact on awareness.	Accepted
H2a	Advertisement has positive and significant impact on visit.	Accepted
H2b	Word of mouth has positive and significant impact on visit.	Accepted
H2c	Endorsement has positive and significant impact on visit.	Accepted
H2d	Social media has positive and significant impact on visit.	Accepted
H2e	Website has positive and significant impact on visit.	Accepted
H3a	Advertisement has positive and significant impact on revisit.	Rejected
H3b	Word of mouth has positive and significant impact on revisit.	Accepted
H3c	Endorsement has positive and significant impact on revisit.	Rejected
H3d	Social media has positive and significant impact on revisit.	Rejected
H3e	Website has positive and significant impact on revisit.	Accepted

1. Conclusion

Nepalese tourism promotions are like daily rituals. Nepal Tourism Board is politicized. Nepal realize the solution for tourism challenges but political hurdles. Big companies in private sectors also does its promotion. Websites are the most effective tools for tourism promotion.

Modern tools for promotion, especially social media and AI technology are effective. Social media, websites, online presence are most effective tools in promoting Nepal. There is the need for measurement of promotional activities before launching new promotion activities. Tourism promotion practices must be reviewed and redesigned.

2. Implications

Based on the conclusions drawn from the key findings of the research, the following policy implications are identified. These implications are for the Federal Government of Nepal (Ministry of Tourism along with the Nepal Tourism Board or NTB), provincial governments, and local governments as per the constitutional and legislative provisions of Nepal. Nepal Tourism Board (NTB) and other related agencies of federal government of Nepal should prioritise social media platforms. Nepal government should allocate funds to train tourism operators and NTB staff in using digital analytics to track the effectiveness of these campaigns. Endorsements from international celebrities, travel influencers, mountaineers, and bloggers who have visited Nepal can amplify its appeal. The

government should sponsor familiarisation (fam) tours for influencers, journalists, and celebrities, ensuring they experience Nepal's unique attractions and share their experiences widely. Advertisements should be tailored to target specific regions. The government should develop AI-driven tools on Nepal Tourism Board's website to engage visitors and provide personalised travel recommendations. Promotional content should be created in multiple languages (e.g., English, Hindi, Mandarin, Thai, Sinhalese, Japanese, Spanish and others) to cater to diverse international audiences. Nepal must create the right brand position in the mind of customers through perceptual mapping and brand-positioning tools. Nepalese tourism slogans like *Nepal for All Season*, *Nepal for Everyone* is against the principles of market segmentation, targeting and positioning. Nepal's commitment to sustainable tourism in all promotional efforts, such as its conservation efforts in Sagarmatha and Annapurna regions or eco-friendly tourism initiatives in remote areas should be highlighted. The federal government should act as a coordinating body to align the efforts of DMOs, NTB, and provincial tourism boards. Nepal must increase political stability and tourism policy stability. Measurable goals should be set for every campaign, such as increased website traffic, social media engagement, and tourist arrivals. The government should focus on creating diverse tourism products, such as mountain biking trails, spiritual retreats, and community-based tourism. Nepal must control pollution, keep destination clean, manage the tourism infrastructures, easy document processing, to create positive word of mouth. Nepal must manage expensive airfare to Nepal by investing more on airlines. Nepal Tourism Board must conduct training programs to tourism business operators because study showed tourism business operators views on tourism promotion are mostly different from reality, tourists' views and perceptions.

Promotional plans must be based on evaluations of the past effectiveness of tools. Advertising must be performed via social media. Websites must be creative, updated and merged into social media. Nepal must develop infrastructure, manage airfare, improve flight security, increase political stability, control pollution and keep cities clean to create positive word of mouth. The endorsement must be from tourism experts and celebrities, not only journalists. Nepalese must seek the right endorser of Nepalese tourism to attract more visitors to Nepal. Social media and endorsement must be emphasized to increase awareness of Nepal. Nepal must create the right position in the mind of customers through perceptual mapping and brand-positioning tools. Social media must be run by professionals using analytical tools to attract repeat visitors to Nepal. To create revists new tourism products and services must be developed, not promotional spending alone. Promotional appeal must match the motive of target tourists. Concurrent tests must be performed to save the remaining expenditure to avoid wasting. Tourism business operator must take trainings on marketing because study showed their views on tourism promotion are mostly different from tourists' views and perceptions. Only Nepalese tourism promotion activities performed by Nepalese enterprises are considered; therefore, future research can also consider Nepalese tourism promotion performed by foreign agencies. Researchers have not clearly determined whether tourism promotion activities took place in Nepal or abroad. Therefore, future research can focus specifically on promotions taking place abroad or in Nepal separately. This same study can be performed on tourists. Future studies could explore the perspective of potential tourists staying abroad. Future studies could cover personal selling, sales promotion and public relations tools for tourism promotion. Mediating variables could be identified and impact measured too.

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