

The Effect of Social Media Marketing on Consumer Behavior in the Georgian Tourism Industry

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to examine consumer behavior regarding the use of social media in the Georgian tourism sector. The article examines the specifics of social media use in the tourism sector. It has been shown that social media is actively used in the business sector in Georgia, however, the impact of social media marketing activities on the behavior of tourism consumers has been poorly studied. As a result of analyzing a variety of literature, research hypotheses and a conceptual model of the research have been formulated. The paper uses a quantitative research method. The variables and measurement items in this study are formed from relevant literature based on a deductive approach. The questionnaire survey method was used for the study. Data were collected through random sampling of consumers. Correlation and regression analysis methods are used to process the collected data. This study found a positive relationship between awareness of social media marketing activities, the quality of information posted on social media, and trust in information posted on social media on tourists' attitudes towards such information. Furthermore, a positive attitude has also been established between tourists' attitudes towards information posted on social media and tourists' satisfaction with said information. This original study contributes to the development of literature in the field of tourism marketing. Its value stems from its potential to enhance the understanding of social media's application as a marketing communication tool within the tourism industry. The results obtained will be useful for tourism organizations that plan to expand their activities using social media marketing.

Keywords: Tourism industry, Georgia, social media, consumer behavior, marketing research.

INTRODUCTION

Social media is an effective platform in the tourism industry, providing information to consumers and tourism service providers (Gebreel & Shuayb, 2022). Social media applications influence consumer decisions and help them easily connect with tourism companies (Abbasi et al., 2023). Tourists, in turn, use social media posts to collect information for price comparison, travel and destination selection (Jamshidi et al., 2023). Therefore, social media has become an important source of external information for tourists, helping them make informed destination decisions (Tešin et al., 2022). Studies show that visitors to tourist destinations, when planning their trips, read reviews posted on social media, which they use to make their preferred choices (Javed et al., 2020; Gebreel & Shuayb, 2022). During their travels, tourists post content (texts, photos, videos) about their destinations and their experiences on social media, and after their travels, they post and share their feedback to help others make decisions (Tsotsou, 2022). Studies show that tourists use social media most to search for travel information (Abbasi et al., 2023; Jamshidi et al., 2023). Jamu and Sari note that the content of information posted on social media influences tourists' interest in choosing a destination of their choice (Jamu & Sari, 2022). In addition, social media encourages organizations working in the tourism sector to collaborate with each other by sharing knowledge and promoting sustainable tourism development (Senyao & Ha, 2022).

The tourism industry in Georgia has been developing rapidly in recent years. In 2024, 5.1 million international tourists arrived, which is 9% more than the same period last year (Geostat, 2024). In Georgia, like in other

countries, the development of the tourism sector is facilitated by information disseminated by travelers and service providers on social media. Despite the widespread use of social media in the Georgian tourism industry, the characteristics of consumer behavior in this area have been poorly studied. Although some studies have been conducted in our country on the use of social media in tourism (Todua & Jashi, 2016; Todua, 2018; Todua, 2019; Todua & Urotadze, 2022), the issues to be studied in this direction remain relevant. Based on the above, the aim of this study is to examine consumer behavior with the use of social media in the Georgian tourism sector. To this end, we developed the following research questions (RQ):

- RQ 1: How does tourists' awareness of social media marketing activities affect their attitudes towards information posted on social media?
- RQ 2: How does the quality of information posted on social media affect tourists' attitudes towards such information?
- RQ 3: How does trust in information posted on social media affect tourists' attitudes towards such information?
- RQ 4: How do tourists' attitudes towards information posted on social media affect tourists' satisfaction with such information?

LITERATURE REVIEW AND DEVELOPMENT OF RESEARCH HYPOTHESES

The present study is based on the Stimulus-Organism-Response (SOR) model developed by Mehrabian and Russell (1974). It assumes that when exposed to a stimulus (S), people generate cognitive and emotional states (O), which in turn trigger their responses (R). This means that people's internal states mediate their possible responses, such as approach or avoidance responses (Lee et al., 2011). The SOR model provides reliable structures that help us explain individual perceptions and emotional behaviors triggered by external stimuli (Su et al., 2020). The validity of the SOR model has been tested in various settings, including the behavior of tourism consumers (Kim et al., 2020; Tang et al., 2019). The SOR model has been used to investigate the input (stimulus), process (organism), and output (response) factors affecting tourist behavior (Kim et al., 2020). For example, the SOR model has been successfully used to study the reliability of sources about destinations (as an external stimulus), the image of destinations (as an organism), and the environmentally responsible behavior of tourists (as a response) (Qiu et al., 2023). In this study, awareness of social media marketing activities, perceived quality of information posted on social media, and perceived trust in information posted on social media were selected as stimulus-determining (independent) variables. The determining (mediating) variable of the organism is the attitude towards information posted on social media, and the reaction (dependent variable) is satisfaction with information posted on social media.

Social media is a marketing strategy tool that uses online platforms to build direct relationships with consumers to increase brand reach and awareness (Ramadhan & Aprillia, 2025). Mason et al. (2021) studied the purchasing decision-making patterns of American and Indian consumers during the COVID-19 pandemic, finding a significant increase in the use of social media marketing platforms for online shopping. The researchers use five dimensions of social media marketing awareness, namely Entertainment, Interaction, Trendiness, Customization, and Electronic Word of Mouth (eWOM) (Kim & Ko, 2012; Malarvizhi et al., 2022; Lim et al., 2024). Entertaining leads to a fun experience through content. Interactivity enhances consumer knowledge through content-based discussion. Trendiness involves the presentation of active information. Personalization ensures an offer that is tailored to consumer preferences. eWOM, through experiences and feedback shared by consumers, influences perception and purchasing decisions. The development of digital technologies in the tourism sector leads to an increase in consumer awareness, which changes their purchasing demand (Altınay et al., 2017). The increase in consumer awareness as a result of stimulating tourism products through digital marketing channels also affects their behavior (Krey et al., 2023).

Information quality refers to how useful it is to consumers (Ho & Gebsumbut, 2019). The quality of information content is an important factor in consumer persuasion (Filieri et al., 2015). The marketing aspect of information quality is that it significantly affects consumers' willingness to make a purchase decision (Wang et al., 2016; Wang & Yan, 2022). The quality and characteristics of online information also affect tourists' decisions. For example, the accuracy, relevance, and timeliness of information affect tourists' behavior in terms of sharing online comments (Filieri & McLeay, 2014). A study by Tang et al. (2012) showed

that social media users who are highly involved in travel are more likely to value the quality of arguments than those who are low in involvement. The completeness of the information tourists gather on social media has a significant impact on their decisions related to choosing destinations (Keelson et al., 2024).

Trust is an individual's confident and positive expectations that arise when interacting with other people or organizations under risk conditions (Moorman et al., 1992). Trust helps people avoid uncertainty and facilitates transactions (Abdurunova et al. 2020). Trust in online purchasing of goods or services is closely related to the effective performance of service providers (Kim & Ahmad, 2013). Consumers always try to choose online services in which they are more confident and believe that the product they buy will meet the requirements of standards (McKnight & Chervany, 2001). In the field of tourism, trust is the belief that consumers have towards tourist destinations (Hussain et al., 2024). Even based on such beliefs, they believe that tourist destinations can meet the promised needs of consumers (Wang & Yan, 2022). Consumers are more likely to trust information about tourist destinations posted on social media by well-informed and experienced providers (Hur et al., 2017; Abdunurova et al., 2020).

According to Ajzen, attitude is defined as an individual's mental reaction to a stimulus, which can be positive or negative (Ajzen, 1989). Attitude refers to consumers' spontaneous evaluations that help them make purchasing decisions (Pavlou & Fygensoon, 2006). The inclusion of attitude as a mediating variable between independent and dependent variables has been discussed in many studies (Chen & Tung, 2014). When the level of independence is high, it can establish a relationship between belief and behavior (Kim et al., 2009). Studies have shown that stimuli lead to positive attitudes towards information posted on social media (Akar & Topçu, 2011; Ki et al., 2020; El-Said, 2020). Based on the studies discussed above, the following hypotheses can be formulated:

- H1: Awareness of social media marketing activities has a positive effect on tourists' attitudes towards information posted on social media;
- H2: The quality of information posted on social media has a positive effect on tourists' attitudes towards such information;
- H3: Trust in information posted on social media has a positive effect on tourists' attitudes towards such information.

Tourist satisfaction is an important signal of sustainable tourism (Vojtko et al., 2022). Therefore, tourist satisfaction is considered to be crucial for the sustainable development of tourism businesses (Lam-González et al., 2025). Pop et al. (2022) argue that social media, which is used to stimulate travel, determines tourists' purchasing decisions and satisfaction. There are many studies that determine the impact of social media on tourist satisfaction (Ramesh & Jaunky, 2021; Prentice & Kadan, 2019). Recent studies have confirmed that social media helps tourism service providers to increase customer satisfaction and loyalty, which leads to their competitive advantage (Bruce et al., 2022; Kumar et al., 2022; Keelson et al., 2024). In turn, satisfied tourists spread positive comments about destinations on social media, which helps potential customers make choices (Pop et al., 2022; Turktarhan & Cicek, 2022). Accordingly, in recent years, researchers have paid special attention to studying satisfaction with information posted on social media about tourist destinations (Li et al., 2006; Wang, 2008; Agyapong & Yuan, 2022). Based on the studies discussed above, we can formulate the following hypothesis (H):

- H4: Tourists' attitude towards information posted on social media has a positive effect on tourists' satisfaction with such information.

Based on the literature review, we developed a conceptual model for the study, which is presented in Figure 1.

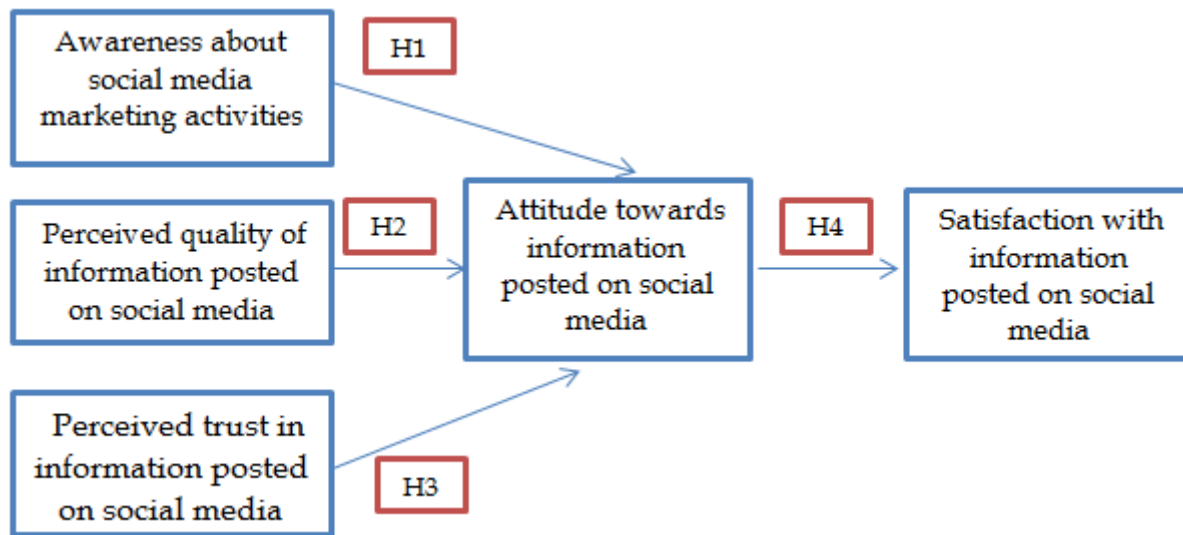


Figure 1: Research model

The study includes three independent variables: awareness about social media marketing activities, quality of information posted on social media, and trust in information posted on social media; one mediating variable (attitude towards information posted on social media); and one dependent variable (satisfaction with information posted on social media). This conceptual model shows the relationship between the above variables.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The paper uses a quantitative research method. Since the aim of the study is to gain knowledge about the impact of social media on the behavior of tourism users and to generalize these results to a selected target group, a quantitative method is best suited for this. This is explained by the fact that the quantitative method is most suitable for collecting and processing data through questionnaires to measure a specific phenomenon (Malhotra, 2020). Data on the research problem can be obtained through interviews, but due to limited resources, an online survey was used in the study. The study takes into account the main key issue of collecting quantitative data that the questionnaire should accurately reflect what information we need to obtain. In addition, explaining why we need this or that information and what its purpose is the most important part of the research design we conducted. Based on the set goal, the study used a structured questionnaire, which includes questions about the respondent's profile and constructs to test the research hypotheses. The questions used in the questionnaire were based on the opinions of the authors reported in the literature review section of this paper. The construct, relevant statements, and authors are presented in Table 1. The questionnaire uses a five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neutral, 4 = agree, 5 = strongly agree).

Table 1: Research construct

Variables	Measurement Items	Adapted from source(s)
Awareness about social media marketing activities (AWA)	Social media provides information about destinations to potential tourists	Kim & Ko (2010); Keelson et al. (2024)
	Social media facilitates tourists in their travel and leisure	
	Social media increases my level of awareness about tourist destinations	
	Social media offers personalized information about tourist destinations	
	Social media provides information about new tourist destinations	

	Through social media, we can share opinions with others or talk to them about tourist destinations	
Perceived quality of information posted on social media (PQ)	Social media provides me with the latest information about tourist destinations	Ho & Gebsombut (2019); Wang et al. (2016)
	Social media provides me with necessary information about tourist destinations	
	Social media provides me with current information about tourist destinations	
	Social media provides me with accurate information about tourist destinations	
	Information about tourist destinations posted on social media is complete	
	Information about tourist destinations posted on social media is real	
Perceived trust in information posted on social media (PT)	Information about tourist destinations posted on social media is reliable	Hur et al. (2017); Abdunurova et al. (2020)
	Providers of information about tourist destinations on social media are well-informed	
	Providers of information about tourist destinations on social media are experienced	
Attitude towards information posted on social media (ATT)	In the future, I will use information posted on social media to plan my vacation and travel	Chen & Tung (2014); Akar & Topçu (2011).
	In the future, I will use information posted on social media to select a desired destination	
	It is my habit to search for information about destinations on social media	
	Regular use of social media about destinations evokes positive emotions in me	
	I have a positive attitude towards tourist destinations that are advertised on social media	
	I have a positive attitude towards tourist destinations that are presented by influencers on social media	
Satisfaction with information posted on social media (SAT)	I am satisfied with the information posted on social media about tourist destinations	Li et al. (2006); Wang (2008); Agyapong & Yuan (2022)
	My experience with the information posted on social media about tourist destinations is very pleasant	
	The information posted on social media about tourist destinations met my expectations	
	The information posted on social media about tourist destinations encourages me to make repeat purchases	

Source: author's work.

We used the probability sampling method to study the general population. The study area was Georgia, and we selected in such a way that it was representative. To determine the sample size, we used the formula known in statistics (Krejcie and Morgan, 1970):

$$S = \frac{x^2 N P(1-P)}{d^2(N-1) + x^2 P(1-P)}, \quad (1)$$

Where: S = required sample size; χ^2 = the table value of chi-square for 1 degree of freedom (df) at the desired confidence level; N = the population size; P = the population proportion (assumed to be .50 since this would provide the maximum sample size); d = the degree of accuracy expressed as a proportion (0.05). Value of chi-square for 95% confidence level is 3,8416 (1,96 X 1,96). Conducting research with such precision is an accepted practice in marketing (Malhotra, 2020).

The target population of our study is the number of social media users in Georgia, which was 2.85 million people by January 2024 (Datareportal, 2024). Based on the above data and formula (1), the sample size will be:

$$S = \frac{1,96^2 \times 2850000 \times 0,5 \times (1 - 0,5)}{0,04^2(2850000 - 1) + 1,96^2 \times 0,5(1 - 0,5)} = 600.1$$

Therefore, the sample size for our study was determined at 601 people. To determine the validity of the questionnaire, we conducted a pre-test with a small group of respondents in April 2024. After correcting the identified shortcomings, we conducted a mass survey of users in May-July 2024. In addition, studies show that if the average response rate from the questionnaires sent is 70-75%, this is considered acceptable (Heslop et al., 1998). Based on the above, we contacted a total of 805 respondents using social networks and e-mail, from which we received 705 responses (completed questionnaires), which is 87.5% of the total. To determine the relevance of the responses in the questionnaires, we checked the standard deviation in the Excel file. We excluded the responses of those respondents for whom the standard deviation was 0. This resulted in 97 such questionnaires and, finally, we selected the responses of 608 respondents for analysis. The obtained data were processed using SPSS-25.

In such studies, researchers use Cronbach's alpha to determine the reliability of the measures. A reliability coefficient is considered acceptable if it is 0.60 or higher (Nunnally, 1967). The reliability statistics we obtained are presented in Table 2. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient for each variable is greater than 0.9, which can be considered a highly reliable coefficient.

Table 2: Reliability statistics

Variables	Cronbach's alpha	Number of items
Awareness about social media marketing activities	0.938	6
Perceived quality of information posted on social media	0.928	6
Perceived trust in information posted on social media	0.896	6
Attitude towards information posted on social media	0.939	3
Satisfaction with information posted on social media	0.919	4
Total	0.938	25

Source: author's work.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

To assess the statistical significance of each variable, Pearson's correlation analysis was employed. As presented in Table 3, the correlations between all variables examined were statistically significant ($P=0.000$). Also, medium and high correlations are established between the variables. The correlation between attitude towards social media and satisfaction was particularly strong ($r=0.736$). Conversely, the weakest correlation was found between self-awareness about social media and satisfaction ($r=0.511$).

Table 3: Correlation between the provisions determining the use of social media in tourism services

Variables		AWA	PQ	PT	ATT	SAT
AWA	Pearson Correlation	1	0.624**	0.544**	0.618**	0.511**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
	N	608	608	608	608	608
PQ	Pearson Correlation	0.624**	1	0.678**	0.666**	0.618**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000		0.000	0.000	0.000
	N	608	608	608	608	608
PT	Pearson Correlation	0.544**	0.678**	1	0.662**	0.584**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	0.000		0.000	0.000
	N	608	608	608	608	608
ATT	Pearson Correlation	0.618**	0.666**	0.662**	1	0.736**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	0.000	0.000		0.000
	N	608	608	608	608	608
SAT	Pearson Correlation	0.511**	0.618**	0.584**	0.736**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	
	N	608	608	608	608	608
** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level						
Source: SPSS output based on own data						

We used regression analysis to test the hypotheses formulated above. Table 4 shows that the 1st, 2nd and 3rd models we developed are reliable [$P < 0.001$, $F(375.012) > F_{kr}(3.84)$; $P < 0.001$, $F(482.755) > F_{kr}(3.84)$; $P < 0.001$, $F(8629.236) > F_{kr}(3.84)$]. Therefore, hypotheses H1, H2 and H3 were confirmed. Accordingly, awareness of social media in tourism services positively affects perceived usefulness (coefficient of determination $R^2 = 0.382$, which allows us to say that 38.2% of the attitude towards social media is caused by awareness, and the rest is explained by other factors). Also, perceived quality has a positive impact on attitude towards social media (coefficient of determination $R^2 = 0.443$, which means that 44.3% of users' attitude towards social media is explained by perceived quality, and the rest by other factors). Attitude towards social media is influenced by perceived trust (coefficient of determination $R^2 = 0.438$, which means that 43.8% of users' attitude towards social media is explained by perceived trust, and the rest by other factors). Regression analysis shows that when the independent variable, social media awareness, increases by one unit, the dependent variable, attitude towards social media, increases by 0.627 units. Also, when the independent variable, perceived quality, increases by one unit, the dependent variable, attitude towards social media, increases by 0.731 units. Based on Table 4, it is clear that when the independent variable, perceived trust, increases by one unit, the dependent variable, attitude towards social media, increases by 0.316 units.

Table 4: Regression analysis of the influence of awareness, perceived quality, and perceived trust in social media activities on consumer attitudes toward social media in tourism services

a) Model Summary				
Model	R	R^2	Adjusted R^2	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.0618	0.382	0.381	4.47928
2	0.666	0.443	0.442	4.25187

3		0.662	0.438	0.437	4.27088		
b) ANOVA							
Model			Sum of Squares	DF	Mean Square	F	P
1	Regression		7524.214	1	7524.214	375.012	0.000
	Residual		12158.726	606	20.064		
	Total		19682.941	607			
2	Regression		8727.436	1	8727.436	482.755	0.000
	Residual		10955.504	606	18.078		
	Total		19682.941	607			
3	Regression		8629.236	1	8629.236	473.083	0.000
	Residual		11053.705	606	18.240		
	Total		19682.941	607			
c) Coefficients							
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	P	
		B	Std. Error	Beta			
1	(Constant)	7.463	0.704		10.601	0.000	
	AWA	0.627	0.032	0.618	19.365	0.000	
2	(Constant)	5.644	0.704		8.021	0.000	
	PQ	0.731	0.033	0.666	21.972	0.000	
3	(Constant)	7.731	0.618		12.510	0.000	
	TR	0.316	0.061	0.662	21.750	0.000	
Notes: Dependent Variable: Attitude towards information posted on social media;							
Predictors (Constant): Awareness about social media marketing activities; Perceived quality of information posted on social media; Perceived trust in information posted on social media							

Source: SPSS output based on own data

Table 5 shows that consumers' attitude towards social media has a positive effect on their satisfaction. Accordingly, the model we developed is reliable ($P < 0.0001$); $F(714.315) > F_{kr}(3.84)$ and hypothesis H4 was confirmed. In addition, the coefficient of determination $R^2 = 0.541$. Therefore, we can say that 54.1% of consumer satisfaction is explained by consumers' attitude towards social media, while the rest is due to other factors. Regression analysis shows that a one-unit increase in the independent variable, attitude towards social media, leads to an increase in the dependent variable, consumer satisfaction, by 0.467 units (see Table 5).

Table 5: Regression analysis of the impact of social media attitudes on consumer satisfaction in tourism services

a) Model Summary							
Model		R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	Std. Error of the Estimate		
4		0.736	0.541	0.540	2.45150		
b) ANOVA							
Model			Sum of Squares	DF	Mean Square	F	P
4		Regression	4292.922	1	4292.922	714.315	0.000
		Residual	3641.966	606	6.010		
		Total	7934.888	607			
c) Coefficients							
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	P	
		B	Std. Error	Beta			
4	(Constant)	4.031	0.374		10.777	0.000	
	SAT	0.467	0.017	0.736	26.727	0.000	
Notes: Dependent Variable: Satisfaction with information posted on social media;							
Predictors (Constant): Attitude towards information posted on social media							

Source: SPSS output based on own data

CONCLUSION

This research offers a comprehensive analysis of the influence of social media on tourism consumers within Georgia. The findings indicate a notable interest among Georgian consumers in tourism destinations, with a growing reliance on social media for information and planning. Correlation and regression analyses demonstrated that awareness of social media marketing activities, the perceived quality of information available, and trust in social media platforms significantly and positively impact consumers' attitudes towards these channels. Subsequently, these attitudes were found to positively influence overall satisfaction levels. Statistically significant values were obtained as a result of analyzing the research results, which reflect the relationships between the above-mentioned variables.

The study's findings corroborate several key insights highlighted in the literature review, underscoring the considerations necessary for tourism organizations to effectively leverage their capabilities. Specifically, the research validates the relevance of the selected variables to tourism customer relationship management. Furthermore, the results align with existing literature regarding the influence of social media on tourist behavior. Consequently, this study contributes theoretically to the understanding of social media's application as a marketing communication tool within the tourism sector. These findings offer actionable insights for companies seeking to enhance customer engagement through social media and refine their marketing strategies. The practical application of the study's results can empower managers within the tourism industry to broaden their comprehension of social media and proactively utilize it to engage target audiences.

Research Limitations And Further Study

Several limitations warrant acknowledgement regarding the present study. First, the research focused primarily on individuals aged 18-35. While this demographic represents a substantial portion of social media users, findings should not be generalized to the entire population. Second, while participants resided in various regions of Georgia, the sample was predominantly drawn from the capital city, Tbilisi. This concentration reflects Tbilisi's status as the most populous area in Georgia, and consequently, its higher concentration of social media users. Future research would benefit from an expanded sample size, incorporating a more diverse representation from regions throughout the country. Furthermore, the inclusion of qualitative research methodologies could facilitate a more nuanced understanding of the specific mechanisms by which social media influences the behavior of tourism service users.

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