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## A Model for Sales Leadership Based on Social Media in the Cultural Tourism Industry

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### ABSTRACT

The cultural tourism industry has undergone a significant metamorphosis driven by the emergence and integration of social media into mainstream marketing and consumer engagement. This paper investigates the development of a customized sales leadership model informed by the dynamics of social media within the cultural tourism context. Recognizing the influence of digital platforms on consumer decision-making and the planning of travel experiences, the study emphasizes the need for a strategic overhaul in marketing and sales leadership. Employing a qualitative research paradigm, in-depth thematic analysis of semi-structured interviews with industry leaders revealed the central role of intelligent data-driven strategies, interactive storytelling, and innovative organizational culture. The study identifies social media as a critical sales technology that shapes effective sales strategies and pivots on the enhancement of customer experiences and satisfaction. A cutting-edge sales leadership framework emerges as crucial for bolstering competitiveness, capturing customer intelligence, and adapting to evolving sales techniques within the cultural domain. Ultimately, the findings illuminate the pathways through which cultural tourism enterprises can utilize social media to refine their sales approaches, optimize the tourist experience, and secure sustainable industry growth. With a high degree of respondent validation and methodological rigor, this research bridges a scholarly gap and provides actionable insights for cultural tourism operators, signaling towards an optimized digital future.

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## **Introduction**

The rapid transformation within the tourism sector, fueled by the rise of social media, has created novel opportunities for the cultural tourism industry to engage with potential tourists. Social media platforms have not only altered the methods by which cultural destinations promote themselves but also reshaped the decision-making processes of travelers, offering new channels for customer interaction and sales (Leung et al., 2013; Sigala, 2018). While the role of social media in tourism marketing is well-documented, its integration into sales leadership models in cultural tourism remains significantly underexplored, despite its potential to drive both customer satisfaction and sales growth (Hudson & Thal, 2013; Ahearne et al., 2005). Given the cultural tourism industry's reliance on personalized experiences and heritage-rich storytelling, a strategic sales leadership model that leverages social media is critical for enhancing destination visibility and deepening tourist engagement. Current models, however, often fall short in adapting to the unique characteristics of cultural tourism, missing opportunities to harness social media as a tool for improving sales performance and fostering customer loyalty. This research fills this critical gap by proposing an innovative sales leadership model specifically tailored for the cultural tourism sector, integrating the dynamic capabilities of social media to drive competitive differentiation.

Despite the wealth of research on social media's influence in various sectors, few studies have directly addressed the intersection of sales leadership and social media in the context of cultural tourism. A comprehensive search in major academic databases, such as Web of Science and Scopus, reveals limited investigations into sales leadership models specific to this sector, underscoring the novelty of the approach presented in this paper. By bridging this gap, the proposed model offers profound insights for practitioners, equipping sales leaders in the cultural tourism industry with the tools needed to capitalize on digital consumer engagement and meet the evolving preferences of today's tourists.

The digital transformation sweeping across the tourism industry presents both challenges and opportunities for sales leaders. As tourists increasingly rely on social media to discover, evaluate, and share cultural experiences, it is imperative that sales leadership models evolve to reflect these shifts. The proposed model in this study introduces a framework that combines traditional sales strategies with digital fluency, enabling leaders to craft personalized, culturally rich engagements that resonate with tourists (Hunter & Perreault Jr, 2007; Moncrief et al., 2002).

In the context of cultural tourism, social media's role extends beyond mere marketing. It shapes how tourists choose destinations, engage with cultural narratives, and develop loyalty to heritage sites. Yet, the ways in which sales leaders can effectively leverage these platforms to design targeted engagements remain underexplored (Munar & Jacobsen, 2014). This study addresses this critical gap by embedding social media's capabilities within a sales leadership framework tailored to the cultural tourism industry. The framework draws on established theoretical models, such as the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT), adapting them to the unique demands of sales leadership in a digital environment (Venkatesh et al., 2003; Davis, 1989). In summary, the novelty of this study lies in its development of a sales leadership model that integrates the complexities of social media engagement with the unique characteristics of cultural tourism. This model not only addresses the essential need for customized leadership strategies in this sector but also provides practical guidance for enhancing tourist experiences and achieving sustainable sales growth.

## **Literature Review**

### **Impact of Social Media on Cultural Tourism Marketing**

Social media has had a significant impact on the marketing strategies in the cultural tourism industry, driving the development of innovative digital marketing models that optimize the promotion of cultural attractions (Armutcu et al., 2023; Wang et al., 2022). These models emphasize the importance of social media platforms in creating engaging experiences, fostering interaction, and driving tourists' decision-making (Krishnamoorthy & Somasundaram, 2023). Through social media, tourists can actively search for information, read reviews, share experiences, and make informed decisions regarding travel (Prados-Peña et al., 2022). Platforms, such as Instagram and Facebook, play a pivotal role in generating excitement, shaping tourists' perceptions, and enhancing the visibility of cultural

heritage (Kocyigit & Küçükcivil, 2022). These strategies align with SoCoMo (social, mobile, and co-creation) marketing frameworks, which aim to create immersive experiences for tourists by providing engaging and interactive content that appeals to their sense of authenticity and cultural connection (Buhalis & Foerste, 2015). By embracing social media marketing, cultural tourism destinations can better meet tourists' demands for meaningful, personalized experiences, driving both customer engagement and long-term loyalty.

### **Development of Sales Leadership Models Based on Social Media**

Sales leadership traditionally involves guiding a sales team, setting strategic goals, and aligning sales activities with broader business objectives (Ingram et al., 2015). In the cultural tourism industry, integrating social media into sales leadership models enhances both destination visibility and tourist engagement. Social media platforms such as YouTube and Twitter allow leaders to effectively promote cultural heritage and increase interaction with potential tourists (Prados-Peña et al., 2022). For example, managers can use these platforms to run promotional campaigns, utilize discounts, contests, and free gifts to boost brand equity and customer engagement (Galiano-Coronil et al., 2023). To foster strong sales leadership in a digital context, tourism leaders must adopt customer-centric strategies that not only focus on sales targets but also encourage deep engagement through personalized social media interactions. This ensures that leadership models align with the evolving expectations of modern tourists, who increasingly demand authentic and culturally immersive experiences (Richards, 2018).

### **Theoretical and Research Gaps in Sales Leadership and Social Media**

Although much research has focused on social media marketing, there remains a notable gap in the literature regarding the integration of sales leadership and social media strategies in the cultural tourism industry (Hughes et al., 2013). The increasing reliance on digital platforms has transformed how tourists engage with destinations, highlighting the need for a redefined leadership model that incorporates digital engagement as a core competency (Leung et al., 2013).

Studies suggest that traditional sales leadership models are insufficient in addressing the dynamic interaction between leadership, social media, and customer behavior (Ahearne et al., 2005). The Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) provides a framework to explain how social media tools are accepted and utilized in sales leadership within cultural tourism (Davis, 1989). However, further research is needed to explore how sales leaders can leverage social media platforms to design personalized and culturally rich engagements that enhance both customer experience and loyalty (Munar & Jacobsen, 2014).

### **Practical and Theoretical Contributions**

This study makes several contributions to both theory and practice. On a practical level, it provides a framework for sales leaders in the cultural tourism sector to enhance customer interaction through targeted social media strategies. The study shows how social media can be used to create engaging experiences that resonate with the needs and expectations of modern cultural tourists.

Theoretically, the research fills a critical gap by embedding social media's dynamic capabilities into existing sales leadership practices, offering a novel approach to leadership in the digital age. This approach demonstrates how traditional leadership models can be adapted to incorporate digital tools and platforms, leading to more effective engagement with culturally inclined tourists.

### **Directions for Future Research**

To further bridge the gap between sales leadership and digital engagement, future research should explore how sales leaders can combine traditional sales strategies with digital fluency. This combination will be critical for leaders to design and execute social media strategies that resonate with tourists' desire for cultural immersion and authentic experiences (Hunter & Perreault Jr, 2007). Additionally, the role of social media in influencing cultural choices of tourists warrants deeper investigation, particularly in how leadership models can adapt to these changing dynamics (Kilipiri et al, 2023). Exploring how leadership models can leverage social media tools to create culturally rich, personalized interactions will be an essential area of study in the future.

## Methodology

This research is situated within the qualitative paradigm and adopts an inductive approach to thematic analysis, in accordance with Braun and Clarke's (2006) guidelines. Thematic analysis is a widely-used qualitative method, prized for its flexibility, which allows for varied and rich accounts of complex data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). It is particularly effective for the interpretive analysis of data obtained from semi-structured interviews. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews with industry leaders, including managers, consultants, and marketing experts in the tourism sector. A purposive sampling strategy was initially employed, followed by a snowball sampling method to extend the reach of participant recruitment (Biernacki & Waldorf, 1981). The insights of these practitioners play a direct role in shaping the study's findings; therefore, participant selection is a critical aspect of the research process. Twelve participants with substantial experience in the industry were selected, ensuring a depth of insight into the nuanced field of sales and marketing within cultural tourism.

**Table 1. Interview Protocol**

Interview Protocol	
1	In your opinion, what impact do social networks have on the decision-making process of tourists when choosing cultural destinations?
2	Regarding sales leadership, which skills or techniques do you consider important for establishing effective communication with customers on social networks?
3	In your opinion, which features of social networks are most important for promoting cultural tourism experiences?
4	What challenges exist in using social networks as a method for leadership and sales management in the cultural tourism sector?
5	In your view, how can sales strategies on social networks help improve the experience of cultural tourists?
6	Describe a story of success or failure in using social networks to create or maintain customer relationships.
7	From your perspective, what is the role of sales leadership in creating and maintaining a positive image for cultural tourism destinations on social networks?
8	What could be key strategies for anticipating and responding to changes in the preferences and demands of cultural tourists using social media data?
9	What has been your experience in training and developing sales team skills for effective use of social networks?
10	How do you think an effective sales leadership model that utilizes social networks to enhance cultural tourism can be designed?

Interviews were conducted until theoretical saturation was reached, at which point no new themes emerged from the data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Data were analyzed concurrently with the collection, ensuring a reflexive and iterative approach to interpretation (Patton, 2002). After the transcription of the interviews, data was subjected to rigorous coding procedures. Attride-Stirling's (2001) thematic network analysis was employed using MAXQDA 2023 to systematically identify and organize themes across the dataset. Basic, organizing, and global themes were extracted to form impactful thematic networks that illustrate the interconnected conceptual map of the study's findings.

Ensuring the reliability and validity of qualitative research data is paramount. In line with Lincoln and Guba's (1985) trustworthiness criteria, the study employed member checking as a means of validating the interpretations, allowing for participant verification of the research findings. To assess the consistency of the coding process, Holsti's (1969) reliability coefficient was calculated following duplicate coding of the data. Achieving a coefficient of 0.98 signals a high level of intercoder reliability and validates the methodological rigor of the study (Neuendorf, 2017).

## Analysis and Findings

In this research, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 12 experts. The Table provided outlines the profile of each interviewee who participated in the study, facilitating an understanding of the demographic and professional spread of participants who contributed to the research findings. Notably, the interviewees predominantly occupy CEO positions within the tourism sector, signaling an inclination towards leadership perceptions in the industry. The inclusion of Marketing Managers and Inbound Tour Marketing Managers complements this viewpoint by encompassing broader marketing strategies and hands-on operational insights. The variation in interview duration, ranging from a succinct 20 minutes to a detailed 55 minutes, suggests a diversity in the depth and complexity of the viewpoints shared, which would potentially enrich the analysis with a varied range of insights. This

variance is instrumental in gauging the extent of information that participants were willing and able to convey within their respective allocated times. The predominance of higher-level executives among the interviewees could imply a strategic focus in the research findings, leading to potential implications for leadership and decision-making processes in the tourism industry. Table 1 below presents a summary of the characteristics of the interviewees. The detailed breakdown facilitates an assessment of the representativeness of the sample group and the potential breadth of perspectives captured during the data collection phase.

**Table 2. Characteristics of the Interviewees**

Interviewee	Field of Activity	Employment Status	Education	year and field of experience	Duration
P1	Travel agency	CEO	PhD	10 years in hospitality management and 25 years specializing in cultural tourism	35 min.
P2	Travel agency	CEO	Master's degree		40 min.
P3	Travel agency	Inbound Tour Marketing Manager	Master's degree	14 years in Travel Coordination and Management	25 min.
P4	Travel agency	CEO	PhD	23 years in Travel Coordination and Management	45 min.
P5	Travel agency	CEO	Bachelor's degree	18 years in Travel Coordination and Management	35 min.
P6	Travel agency	Marketing Manager	Bachelor's degree	9 years in Event Planning	30 min.
P7	Travel agency	CEO	PhD	17 years specializing in cultural tourism	55 min.
P8	Travel agency	Inbound Tour Marketing Manager	Master's degree	15 years in Travel Coordination and Management	30 min.
P9	Travel agency	CEO	Master's degree	21 years in Travel Coordination and Management	25 min.
P10	Travel agency	Marketing Manager	Master's degree	12 years in Event Planning	35 min.
P11	Travel agency	CEO	PhD	16 years in Travel Coordination and Management	35 min.
P12	Travel agency	CEO	Master's degree	16 years in Travel Coordination and Management	20 min.

In this research, open codes, concepts, and categories were identified through thematic analysis, resulting in the identification of 43 basic themes, 10 organizing themes, and 3 global themes. Each of these themes has been examined in detail. The thematic framework developed includes:

Global Theme 1: Intelligent Data-Driven Strategies

Organizing Themes:

- Smart Marketing
- Data Visualization
- Responsiveness Dynamics

Global Theme 2: Interactive Storytelling Experiences

Organizing Themes:

- Storytelling
- The Integration of Social Media in Travel
- Dynamic Communication

Global Theme 3: Innovation and Organizational Culture

Organizing Themes:

- Empowering the Team
- Brand Persona
- Modernization

Practical recommendations have been enhanced with specific examples from successful case studies, such as the use of Instagram by the Louvre Museum to engage with a global audience (Kotler



Table 3.

Code System	Frequency
<b>The Integration of Social Media in Travel</b>	<b>6</b>
Influential Platforms' Role	1
The Ability to Share Content	1
Widespread Impact of Social Networks	1
The Role of Social Networks in Inspiring Travelers to Choose Destinations	1
Social Media as a Vital Tool for Attracting Attention and Excitement Among Travelers	1
Selling Pleasurable Experiences Through Social Media Networks	1
<b>Modernization</b>	<b>12</b>
The Necessity of Quick Response to Sudden Changes	1
Competition and Challenges	1
Facing the Competitive Market and the Need for Creativity in Marketing	1
The Challenge of Consistently Providing New and Unique Content	1
Creative Strategies of the Company in Order to Remain a Leader in the Industry	1
Limitations of Creativity on Producing Unique Content	1
Integrating Technology and Customer Understanding in Sales Leadership Modeling To Enhance Cultural Tourism	1
Competition and Continuous Updating	1
The Need for Continuous Creative Ideas	1
The Need for Continuous Creativity to Avoid Repetition in Campaigns	1
Successful Attraction of a Large Group Through an Engaging Campaign	1
Striving for Continuous Innovation and Offering Attractive and Up-To-Date Services	1
<b>Brand Persona</b>	<b>28</b>
Maintaining Customer Trust and Loyalty Alongside Attractiveness	1
Challenges Associated with Striking a Balance Between Advertising and Maintaining Brand Authenticity	1
Using Local Culture as a Tool to Attract Tourists	1
Enhancing the Level of Customer Trust	1
Building and Maintaining Trust and Relationships with Customers	1
Learning from Experiences	1
Creating a Brand Based on Trust and Customer Loyalty	1
Creating a Positive and Committed Image to Build Trust	1
Managing Corporate Culture, and Maintaining and Enhancing a Positive Image	1
Creating and Maintaining a Good Feeling for Customers Through Positive Brand Imagery	1
Displaying a Positive and Brand-Consistent Image on Social Networks	1
Creating an Attractive Image of the Destination in the Mind of the Audience	1
Crisis Management of Thoughtless Social Media Posts	1
Emphasizing the Role of the CEO in Maintaining the Ethical Standards of Marketing	1
Emphasizing Customer Loyalty to the Brand and Creating Continuous Positive Experiences	1
The Role of the Marketing Manager in Maintaining Company Standards	1
Brand Image Management	1
The Importance of the CEO's Role in Maintaining Standards and Promoting the Brand Image	1
Showing Enthusiasm for implementing the Trips Offered by the Agency	1
The Importance of Brand Management and Leadership in Creativity	1
Creative and Strategic Leadership to Create an Image of the Destination's Values and Culture	1
The Importance of Creating a Positive and Real Image to Build Trust	1
Explaining the Role of CEO in Shaping Brand Identity and Positive Marketing	1
Ensuring Advertising Compatibility with Brand Identity	1
Brand Positioning	1
Using Effective Images in Social Networks to Attract Tourists	1
Creating a Constructive Image of the Destination	1
Sales Leadership as a Cultural Ambassador	1
<b>Empowering the Team</b>	<b>16</b>
Specialized Workshops and Increasing the Team's Mastery of Digital Tools	1
Periodic Training Programs	1
Up-To-Date Training Courses and Adaptation to Innovations	1
Holding Training Courses by the Management to Update the Knowledge of the Team	1
Investing in Training and Continuous Improvement	1
Workshops to Improve Social Networking Skills	1
Engaging the Team in the Process of Designing and Implementing Campaigns	1
Holding Regular Training Programs to Keep the Team Up to Date	1
Holding Training Courses and Collecting Feedback for Continuous Improvement	1
Improving the Skills of the Sales and Digital Marketing Teams	1
Ensuring Continuous Updating of Team's Knowledge Based on New Technologies	1
Investing in Training and Updating Team's Knowledge	1
Necessity of Continuous Training and Updating the Skills of the Sales Team	1
Efforts to Develop the Skills of the Sales Team	1
Valuing Continuous Growth and Development in Sales and Marketing	1
Sales Team Training	1

**Table 3.**

<b>Code System</b>	<b>Frequency</b>
<b>Storytelling</b>	<b>25</b>
Influence of Shared Images and Content	1
The Need for Attractive and Innovative Content	1
Creating a Dreamy Image of the Trip	1
Sharing Photos and Reviews as well as Its Impact on Travel Motivation	1
The Company's Commitment to Sharing Detailed Experiences and Focusing on Customer Attention to Detail	1
Campaigns and Engagement Strategies Based on Storytelling	1
Emphasizing Travel as an Experience Beyond Physical Movement	1
Focus on Storytelling to Showcase the Culture and Values of the Destination	1
Creating a Deep Connection with the Audience Through Pleasant Stories and Images	1
Improving the Awareness of Foreign Travelers about the Cultural and Historical Treasures of Iran	1
Using Storytelling to Depict Attractive Tourism Experiences	1
Producing Attractive Content to Show Iranian Culture and Induce a Sense of Curiosity in the Audience	1
Creating Powerful and Experience-Oriented Mental Images	1
Emphasis on the Power of Attractive Images and Videos and Real Stories	1
Turning Trips into Exceptional Experiences Through Engaging Content	1
Creating Engaging Stories and Content for Identification	1
Focusing on Storytelling and Showcasing Pristine Beauty	1
Encouraging the Sharing of Tourism Experiences	1
The Role of Images and Videos in Travel Decision-Making	1
Exchanging Tourism Experiences	1
Motivating Through Visual Content	1
Inspiration From Others	1
Storytelling	1
Describing Travel as an Artistic Process	1
Using Cultural Stories to Represent Destinations	1
<b>Dynamic Communication</b>	<b>22</b>
The Importance of Establishing a Personal and Intimate Relationship with Customers	1
Introducing Sales Leadership Based on Establishing Friendship with Customers	1
Customer Orientation and Using Feedback to Improve the Tourism Experience	1
Communicating as a Real Person to Create a Sense of Closeness	1
Enhancing the Customer Experience by Providing Targeted Offers	1
Flexibility and Speed of Action in Fixing Mistakes	1
Immediate Communication and Timely Responses	1
Communicating with the Customer	1
The Key is to Respond Appropriately and Constructively	1
The Importance of Listening and Responding Accurately on Social Media	1
Replacing the Traditional Sales Process with Customer-Oriented Approaches	1
Using Social Networks to Deepen Relationships with Customers	1
Emphasis on the Necessity of Strong Expression Techniques and Identification of Customers' Needs	1
Responding to Customer Needs and Requests	1
Personalization of Communication and Deep Understanding of Customer Emotions	1
The Need to Adjust the Content Based on the Interests of the Audience	1
Institutionalizing the Culture of Sincere Dialogue Through Social Network Chats	1
The Necessity Of Responsiveness and Empathy in Interacting with Customers on Social Networks	1
Direct Interaction with Customers Through Real Experiences	1
The Importance of Two-Way Communication and Personalization	1
Extracting Necessary Lessons to Improve Future Strategies for Long-Term Communication	1
Emphasis on Factors of Attraction and Change in Decision-Making	1
<b>Data visualization</b>	<b>35</b>
Customizing Offers Using Data Analysis	1
Forecasting Needs	1
Creating Sales Leadership Strategies Based on Detailed Analysis	1
Prioritizing the Integration of Information to Make Strategic Decisions	1
Managing Customer Expectations and Anticipating Their Needs	1
Using Data Analysis and Strategic Response	1
Data-Driven Adaptation to Make Macro Decisions and Improve Sales Models	1
Designing Marketing Strategies Based on Collected Data	1
Using the Information Obtained for Marketing Mechanisms	1
Combining Data, Customer Needs, and Feedback into an Integrated System	1
Active Listening and Data Analysis	1
Continuous Assessment of Service Quality and Customer Satisfaction with Them	1
Continuous Testing and Evaluation of Sales Strategies and Their Optimization	1
Developing Customized and Data-Driven Strategies to Attract Tourists	1
Analytical Approaches in Identifying Customer Needs and Trends	1
Using Customer Feedback to Improve Services	1

**Table 3.**

<b>Code System</b>	<b>Frequency</b>
Development of Sales Leadership Models Based on Data and Customer Feedback	1
Identifying Behavioral Patterns and Adapting to New Demands	1
Collecting and Analyzing Social Media Data to Predict Trends	1
Using Strategic Data	1
Focusing on Collecting and Analyzing Data to Predict and Match Tourist Preferences	1
Collecting Data to Understand the Needs of Tourists	1
Using Customer Feedback to Improve Tourism Offers	1
Data Collection and Analysis	1
Accurate Understanding of Customer Needs and Interests	1
Understanding Users and Their Needs	1
Systematic Review and Analysis of Social Networks for a Deeper Understanding of Trends	1
Continuous Matching of Supply with Changing Demand	1
Evaluation and Prevention of Negative Reactions to Advertising Campaigns	1
Detailed Review and Planning of Decisions to Improve Customer Experience	1
Adjusting Marketing Strategies Based on the Feedback Obtained	1
Analysis of Users' Behavioral Data	1
The Effects of Social Networks on Tourists' Preliminary Research and Decision-Making	1
Extracting Actionable Data From User Behaviors in Social Media	1
Data Monitoring and Trend Analysis	1
<b>Smart Marketing</b>	<b>29</b>
Flexibility and Speed in Changing Strategies	1
The Ability to Share Content Quickly	1
Direct Conversation	1
Continuous Interaction and Management of Reviews with Professionalism	1
Making Strategic Decisions to Increase Attraction and Improve the Travel Experience for Customers	1
Avoid Excessive Advertising	1
The Effect of Creativity and User Participation in Successful Campaigns	1
The Importance of Targeted Campaigns	1
Combining Tourism Needs with Features of Social Networking Platforms	1
Promoting Tourism Culture and Attractions Through Interesting Stories and Posts	1
Using Interactive Campaigns to Attract Visitors	1
New Ways of Communicating with Customers Instead of Direct Sales	1
Designing Marketing Campaigns Based on User Preferences	1
Combining Tools and Strategies of Social Networks with the Goals of Cultural Tourism	1
Combining Sales Tactics with Educational and Valuable Content	1
Creating Attractive And Valuable Content	1
Providing Personalized Offers to Interested Users	1
The Need to Pay Attention to the Precise Design of Campaigns to Prevent Customer Dissatisfaction	1
Digital Interactions	1
Using Social Networks for Positioning and Targeted Marketing	1
Strong Campaigns Based on User Experiences	1
Survey Tools and Targeted Advertising	1
Trying to Create New and Distinctive Content in Social Networks	1
Adapting Marketing Strategies to Collected Data	1
Introducing New Tools and Marketing Techniques	1
Organizing Creative and Motivational Campaigns	1
Following Trends and Algorithm Changes	1
Combining Traditional Strategies with Digital Tactics	1

For the overarching theme of Intelligent Data-Driven Strategies, three organizing themes were identified: "Smart Marketing," "Data visualization," and "Responsiveness Dynamics." Each organizing theme encompasses a set of specific basic themes that, collectively, offer a granular view of the strategic components integral to intelligent data-driven marketing initiatives. The enumeration of themes coupled with the quantification of references adds robustness to the thematic structure, allowing for a measured interpretation of the data. This framework not only facilitates a structured examination but also provides readers with a clear view of the data's intricate network. For the "Smart Marketing" theme, the strategy emphasizes the harmonization of foresight with data discovery to deliver precisely targeted marketing endeavors. "Strategic Convergence" and "Precision Targeting" represent the fusion of innovative platform integration and granular audience analytics to deploy compelling promotional content that aligns with potential tourists' cultural inclinations. Furthermore, the development of authentic digital engagement, personalization, and avoiding advertising saturation through "Digital Interaction and Communication," "Customer-Centricity and Personalization," and

"Strategic Experience and Authenticity" create a deeply resonant customer journey on social media platforms. These efforts cultivate a dynamic, culturally-enriched community eager to participate in and share their tourism experiences. The "Data Visualization" theme focuses on presenting complex social media data streams in an accessible and interpretable format, where "Data Monitoring and Trend Analysis" and "Actionable Data Discovery" support the identification and exploitation of actionable trends and insights in cultural tourism interest. Moreover, "Responsive and Informed Engagement" and "Strategic Data Utilization" emphasize the capacity to respond to real-time cultural market dynamics and consumer behaviors based on visual analytics, aligning sales leadership approaches with emerging travel desires and feedback. Lastly, the organizing theme of "Responsiveness Dynamics" reveals the research's acknowledgment of the importance of "Effective Communication and Sensitivity" in cultivating relationships with cultural tourists. This encapsulates the agility and sensitivity necessary for sales leadership within social media spaces, facilitating prompt and thoughtful communication strategies that resonate with the diverse needs and expectations of cultural tourists. Table 4 encapsulates the emergent themes that were identified, revealing the layered nature of 'Intelligent Data-Driven Strategies' within the context of the current research.

**Table 4. Themes Related to Intelligent Data-Driven Strategies**

Overarching Theme	Organizing Theme	Basic Theme	References	
Intelligent Data-Driven Strategies	Smart Marketing	Strategic Convergence	P2, P4, P7, P1	
		Data-Driven Insights	P4, P8, P2	
		Precision Targeting	P2, P5, P8	
		Digital Interaction and Communication	P4, P12, P3	
		Customer-Centricity and Personalization	P4, P10, P9, P5, P6	
		Avoiding Advertising Saturation	P2	
		Strategic Experience and Authenticity	P9, P5, P1, P8, P4	
		Data Monitoring and Trend Analysis	P11, P9, P5, P3, P10, P8, P6, P1, P4	
		Actionable Data Discovery	P9, P6, P11, P7	
		Responsive and Informed Engagement	P2, P6, P1	
	Data visualization	Strategic Data Utilization	P7, P10, P8, P12, P4	
		Customer-Centric Data Integration	P6, P9, P2, P6, P10, P11	
		Responsiveness Dynamics	Effective Communication and Sensitivity	P3, P12, P1

For the overarching theme of Interactive Storytelling Experiences, three organizing themes were identified: "Storytelling," "The Integration of Social Media with Travel," and "Dynamic Communication." 'Storytelling,' as an organizing theme, encapsulates the core components of weaving a compelling narrative, including the articulation of cultural richness and the utilization of visual elements. These components encourage interaction and sharing, promoting travel not only as an activity but as an exceptional experience filled with dialogues and innovations. The second organizing theme, 'The Integration of Social Media with Travel,' recognizes the indispensable role of social media in crafting and disseminating travel narratives. This theme's basic themes suggest how social media's reach and influence create an appealing ambiance that fosters excitement, thereby stimulating interest in travel narratives. Under 'Dynamic Communication,' there is an emphasis on the need for personalized, bidirectional channels of communication. This involves not only the expectation for brands and organizations to listen and be responsive but also to adopt a more humanized and customer-centric approach in their engagement strategies. Each of these themes is supported by a myriad of references, reflecting their prevalence and importance in the data of the current study. The explicit naming of basic themes under each organizing theme underscores the granularity and specificity with which data were examined to yield meaningful insights. Table 5 displays the identified themes under 'Interactive Storytelling Experiences,' providing a structured overview of how dynamic and interactive components contribute to immersive storytelling in the travel industry.

**Table 5. Themes Related to Interactive Storytelling Experiences**

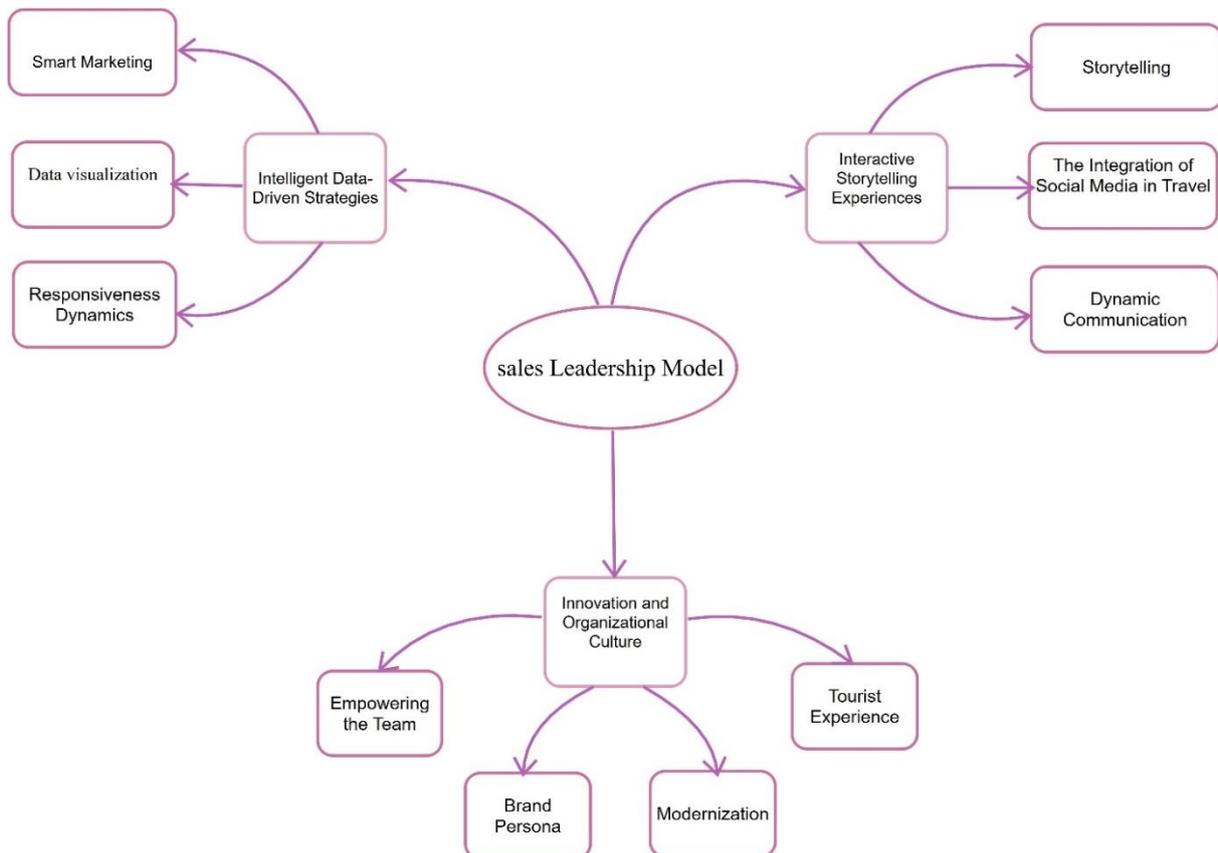
Overarching Theme	Organizing Theme	Basic Theme	References
Interactive Storytelling Experiences	Storytelling	Narrating Cultural Richness	P8, P3, P6
		Visual Storytelling	P1, P4, P8, P7, P5, P6, P3
		Interaction and Sharing	P4, P12
		Direct Dialogue and Responsiveness	P8
		Travel as an Exceptional Experience	P9, P2, P8
		Innovation-based Strategies	P12
	The Integration of Social Media in Travel	Social Media Influence	P2, P12
		Appeal and Ambiance	P1, P9
		Excitement and Interest Stimulation	P10, P7
	Dynamic Communication	Two-Way Personalized Communication	P10, P9, P11, P3, P4
		Listening and Responsiveness	P3, P1, P7, P6, P5
		Customer-Centric Approaches	P7, P10, P9, P5
		Humanized Engagement	P4, P10, P7, P3

For the overarching theme of Innovation and Organizational Culture, four organizing themes were identified: “Empowering the Team,” “Brand Persona,” “Modernization,” and “Tourist Experience.” ‘Empowering the Team,’ as an organizing theme, indicates the imperative of fostering a skilled, knowledgeable workforce capable of adapting and contributing to innovation. This includes commitment to continuous learning, investment in team education, and iterative training programs with a feedback loop that actively engages team members in the innovation process. The ‘Brand Persona’ theme encompasses the personification of the brand through leadership roles and the establishment of a consistent and ethical brand image, emphasizing integrity while driving customer engagement and experience. ‘Modernization’ addresses the adaptation of new technologies, the creativity involved in crafting dynamic campaigns, and the necessity of strategic agility. Emphasis on leveraging technology highlights the need for user-centric personalization and interaction to enhance cultural tourism experiences. Lastly, ‘Tourist Experience’ is an organizing theme that underscores the importance of creating memorable, culturally rich experiences. Emotional engagement and the anticipation of new experiences remain key elements, coupled with the social currency of sharing these moments, which collectively contribute to a positive influence on the tourism economy. The detailed reference count further substantiates the relevance of each theme, ensuring the integrity of the study’s thematic analysis. Table 6 presents a synthesis of the themes related to ‘Innovation and Organizational Culture,’ showing the multifaceted approaches that businesses can employ to infuse innovation into their culture and, thus, enhance the tourist experience.

**Table 6. Themes Related to Innovation and Organizational Culture**

Overarching Theme	Organizing Theme	Basic Theme	References
Innovation and Organizational Culture	Empowering the Team	Continuous Learning and Skill Advancement	P4, P1, P6, P10, P5, P9, P11
		Investment in Team Education	P7, P2, P8, P3
		Iterative Training with Feedback Loop	P12, P6, P8
	Brand Persona	Engagement in Innovation Process	P10
		Leadership as Brand Ambassadors	P12, P1, P7, P6, P8, P4, P10
		Consistent Brand Image	P2, P3, P6, P9, P11
		Brand Integrity and Ethics	P5, P2, P9, P6
		Customer Engagement and Experience	P10, P8, P7, P9
	Modernization	Continuous Learning and Development	P12
		Innovation and Creativity	P11, P8, P7, P1
		Dynamic Campaigns and Customer Engagement	P6, P10
		Leveraging Technology for Cultural Tourism	P5
		Strategic Agility	P1
	Tourist Experience	User-Centric Personalization and Interaction	P11
		Culturally Rich Experiences	P9, P6, P3, P11
		Emotional Engagement and Anticipation	P10, P6, P1
Sharing and Influence		P7, P6, P4	

The Sales Leadership Model, illustrated in Figure 2, encapsulates the essential elements derived from our thematic analysis. Intelligent Data-Driven Strategies, Interactive Storytelling Experiences, and Innovation in Organizational Culture serve as the pillars of this model, each bolstered by its respective organizing themes, such as Smart Marketing, Storytelling, and Empowering the Team. These components interact dynamically to shape a robust approach to sales leadership in the cultural tourism industry. For a visual representation of these interactions and the structure of the model, see Figure 2.



**Fig. 2. The Proposed Research Model**

In the following, we will give more comprehensive explanations to describe the model. This model consists of three overarching themes, which is the first overarching theme of Intelligent Data-Driven Strategies with three basic themes of Smart Marketing, Data Visualization and Responsiveness Dynamics. Smart marketing focuses on leveraging data to improve marketing strategies. It concerns using insights from data to understand customer behaviors and market trends, thus enabling more effective targeting and personalization of marketing campaigns. The second organizing theme is Data Visualization. This theme emphasizes the importance of presenting complex data in a straightforward, visually engaging way. Data visualization aids stakeholders in grasping insights quickly, facilitating informed decision-making associated with strategies and operations. The third organizing theme is Responsiveness Dynamics. Responsiveness Dynamics concerns the agility and flexibility of an organization to react promptly to customer feedback and market changes. This theme underscores the need for businesses to be attentive and reactive in real-time to data-driven insights.

The second overarching theme identified in this research is Interactive Storytelling Experiences. The first organizing theme is storytelling. Here, the focus is on crafting compelling narratives that engage consumers. Good storytelling in cultural tourism connects emotionally with audience, highlights the unique qualities of destinations, and enhances the overall customer experience.

The second Organizing Theme is The Integration of Social Media in Travel. This theme addresses how social media platforms are utilized to augment the travel experience. It explores how brands use social media to influence and engage with travelers, encouraging sharing and interactions that can

amplify their reach and influence decision-making. Finally, the third organizing theme is Dynamic Communication. Dynamic Communication involves a bidirectional dialogue between brands and consumers, emphasizing personalized and responsive interactions. This theme underscores the shift from one-sided communication to a more conversational approach where consumer voices are heard and valued.

The third and the last overarching theme that is discovered in this research is Innovation and Organizational Culture. The first organizing theme is empowering the team. Its emphasis is on building a capable, well-informed team that is prepared and encouraged to contribute innovative ideas. This can involve investing in training and fostering an organizational culture that values continuous learning and improvement. The second organizing theme is Brand Persona. This theme revolves around the consistent and ethical representation of the brand's identity. It's about personifying the brand in a way that aligns with core values and resonates with the target audience to drive customer engagement and loyalty. The third organizing theme is Modernization. Modernization refers to the adoption of new technologies and innovation in product/service offerings and marketing strategies. It concerns staying relevant in a fast-paced market, often utilizing the latest digital tools to enhance the tourist experience. The last organizing theme is Tourist Experience. The final theme is concerned with creating memorable and unique experiences for tourists. This theme revolves around ensuring that every interaction counts and that services offered lead to emotional engagement and lasting memories.

## **Discussion**

This study emphasizes the importance of intelligent data-driven strategies, interactive storytelling experiences, and organizational innovation in enhancing sales leadership within the cultural tourism industry through social media platforms. However, the discussion requires a deeper exploration of existing theories associated with commercial leadership and cultural tourism, ensuring the results are thoroughly analyzed within these conceptual frameworks.

## **Sales Leadership and Social Media Integration**

Sales leadership in the cultural tourism industry can be closely associated with transformational leadership, where leaders leverage social media to inspire, engage, and motivate audiences by crafting personalized experiences (Bass & Avolio, 1994). This approach aligns with the findings from our study, where the ability of leaders to utilize data-driven strategies and real-time responsiveness is deemed crucial for influencing tourist decisions. Previous research supports this, indicating that leaders who are adept at using social media data can better align their marketing efforts with tourist expectations, thus driving sales (Wang et al., 2022; Armutcu et al, 2023).

In line with Kotler's marketing theory, sales leadership on social media requires precise targeting and strategic content dissemination to build trust and engage customers (Kotler & Keller, 2016). The ability of leaders to guide their teams in leveraging digital platforms for marketing and communication can foster a customer-centric culture, which has been proven to drive customer loyalty and brand engagement (Kocyigit & Küçükcivil, 2022).

## **Cultural Tourism and Storytelling**

Now it is almost clear that tourism and, especially, cultural tourism is important for countries, people, economy and life, as well as the representation of their native and national cultures. In fact, cultural tourism is a type of tourism that is related to the culture of a country or region. Cultural tourism focuses specifically on the way of life of the people in these geographical areas and the history, art, architecture, religions and other elements that have helped them pursue their way of life. It can be argued that Iran is one of the best destinations for this type of tourism in the world and is recognized globally (Baber et al, 202; Mahdinia et al, 2022; Ghasemi et al, 2023). Iran hosts one of the most diverse and richest compilations of cultural heritage found in contemporary societies today (Rodrigues et al, 2018).

Tourism with a cultural approach aims to immerse visitors in the Iranian world, viewing the tourist as its audience. Cultural and historical artifacts are regarded as a heritage ecosystem that signifies Iranian identity; additionally, the objective of tourism with a cultural approach is to foster an understanding that leads to cultural self-awareness. Such familiarity is possible only when visiting

historical and cultural monuments in tourism is not limited to increasing information and solving historical curiosities from behind the closed doors of historical monuments (Heydari Chianeh et al, 2018; Rodrigues et al, 2019; Beheshti, 2020). The importance of storytelling in cultural tourism cannot be overstated. Social media allows cultural tourism leaders to craft compelling narratives that highlight the richness of a destination's cultural heritage, thereby creating an emotional connection with the audience. Studies have demonstrated that interactive storytelling significantly enhances tourist engagement by creating immersive and memorable experiences (Richards, 2018; Giomelakis et al., 2021). In the current study, social media storytelling was found to be a pivotal tool for differentiating cultural tourism offerings, aligning with existing literature on the role of digital narratives in tourism (Buhalis & Foerste, 2015). Moreover, the use of visual storytelling and user-generated content on platforms such as Instagram has been shown to amplify a destination's appeal and cultural significance (Liang et al, 2021). Our findings confirm that cultural tourism leaders must invest in creating engaging content that resonates emotionally with tourists while maintaining authenticity, thus fostering deeper connections and brand loyalty.

### **Organizational Culture and Innovation**

The study also highlights the role of innovation and organizational culture in enabling sales leadership through social media. Continuous learning, technological modernization, and team empowerment are considered as key themes. By fostering a culture of continuous improvement and technological adoption, cultural tourism organizations can stay competitive and responsive to market shifts (Pasandideh et al, 2024). Research suggests that empowering teams to innovate and participate in content creation and marketing strategies strengthens an organization's adaptability in the digital era (Kotler & Keller, 2016). This aligns with our findings, where leadership's focus on modernization and brand integrity is crucial in maintaining a competitive edge in cultural tourism.

### **Conclusions and Suggestions**

This study has elucidated the crucial role of social media in sculpting the sales leadership model within the cultural tourism industry. Through the qualitative analysis drawn from interviews with prominent professionals in the sector, notable findings and recommendations have been crystallized.

### **Conclusion**

This study highlights the pivotal role of social media in shaping sales leadership models within the cultural tourism industry. It identifies three key components essential for leveraging social media to enhance sales performance: intelligent data-driven strategies, interactive storytelling experiences, and organizational innovation. Leaders in the cultural tourism sector must embrace data visualization and customer-centric marketing to effectively anticipate market trends and personalize offerings.

Our findings emphasize that social media storytelling is instrumental in creating emotional connections with tourists. This is supported by previous studies that highlight the significance of digital narratives in enhancing tourist engagement and brand loyalty (Giomelakis et al., 2021; Buhalis & Foerste, 2015). Moreover, the importance of continuous learning and technological modernization is underscored, as they are critical to maintaining brand integrity and responding to the ever-changing market dynamics of the tourism sector.

In the context of cultural tourism, interactive storytelling not only sustains audience interest but also fosters an immersive experience that differentiates tourism offerings (Liang et al., 2021). Social media facilitates an inclusive dialogue among stakeholders, contributing to the sustainable management of cultural heritage. These platforms broaden public participation in heritage conservation, proving invaluable in creating emotional connections with potential tourists through innovative storytelling and dynamic communication.

Furthermore, this study illustrates the importance of innovation and organizational culture in enhancing sales leadership. Empowering teams, cultivating a strong brand persona, and leveraging modernization are key factors in sustaining a competitive edge in the market. The findings echo previous research on the role of sales leadership in using precise targeting and customer feedback to drive responsiveness and engagement (Wang et al., 2022).

Building on the existing literature, this research aligns with the ISMAS+4I theory (Shang et al., 2022), which highlights the core demands of tourists and provides a novel framework for social media marketing in cultural tourism. This study also extends insights from Krishnamoorthy et al. (2023), who emphasized the role of social media in educational tourism, and Prados-Peña et al. (2022), who explored the connection between social media promotions and brand equity.

In conclusion, this study offers a refined sales leadership model for the cultural tourism industry, highlighting the power of interactive storytelling, the strategic use of technology, and the effective positioning of cultural richness. These principles lay the foundation for cultivating a competitive, innovative, and sustainable cultural tourism industry, attuned to the shifting dynamics of today's digital consumer landscape.

### **Suggestion and Practical Implications**

Organizations aiming to succeed in the cultural tourism sector should prioritize a customer-centric approach. By leveraging social media analytics, businesses can track real-time customer preferences, tailor content to evolving demands, and ensure responsiveness. This strategy enhances personalization, boosts customer loyalty, and increases conversion rates, as it allows companies to deliver content that aligns with audience interests and expectations.

Incorporating data visualization tools into marketing strategies is crucial for organizations that seek to make informed, data-driven decisions. These tools facilitate the analysis of social media engagement, allowing leaders to anticipate market trends and understand which cultural narratives resonate with their target audience. By employing data visualization, organizations can better predict consumer behavior and craft marketing efforts that align with identified preferences, enhancing the overall effectiveness of their campaigns.

Enhancing digital interaction is another key area of focus. Interactive storytelling on platforms, such as Instagram, YouTube, and Facebook, can be used to create immersive experiences such as virtual tours, live-streamed events, and user-generated content campaigns. Engaging audiences through dynamic multimedia content not only expands the organization's reach but also strengthens connections with potential tourists. This strategy capitalizes on the study's theme of fostering audience interaction through engaging and culturally enriched narratives.

Investment in continuous learning is essential for teams to remain adaptable in the rapidly evolving social media landscape. Organizations should prioritize ongoing education and training, ensuring that staff members stay up-to-date with the latest tools and strategies. By doing so, employees are empowered to engage effectively with audiences, utilizing innovative methods to attract and retain tourists.

Team involvement and empowerment are vital for driving creativity and innovation within cultural tourism organizations. Encouraging staff to contribute to content creation and marketing strategies fosters a sense of ownership and collaboration. When employees are actively involved in shaping the organization's cultural narratives, the quality and relevance of content improve, leading to more authentic and compelling engagement with audiences.

Maintaining brand integrity across all social media platforms is another critical consideration. Organizations should ensure that their content and stories consistently align with their core values and ethics. By presenting a cohesive and authentic brand image, companies can build trust with their audience and strengthen brand recognition in a crowded market.

Storytelling remains a powerful tool for engaging potential tourists. Organizations should develop narratives that highlight the unique cultural aspects of destinations, using the visual and interactive capabilities of social media to connect emotionally with audiences. This approach not only fosters deeper engagement but also encourages visitors to form meaningful connections with the brand.

Finally, embracing technological innovation is necessary for staying competitive. Integrating advanced technologies such as augmented reality (AR) and artificial intelligence (AI) into marketing strategies can create memorable, culturally enriched experiences. These technologies provide an opportunity for brands to stand out by offering unique and interactive content that captures the imagination of audiences and enhances the overall cultural tourism experience.

## **Limitations**

While this study provides valuable insights into the role of social media in enhancing sales leadership within the cultural tourism industry, several limitations must be acknowledged.

**Content Limitations:** The scope of data analyzed in this research is restricted to a select set of social media platforms, which may not capture the entire spectrum of social media usage in the cultural tourism sector. Future studies could expand the scope to include emerging platforms and diverse types of user-generated content to provide a more comprehensive understanding. Additionally, the study's regional specificity presents another limitation. The findings are based on cultural tourism practices within the unique socio-economic, cultural, and technological landscape of Iran. This regional focus offers in-depth insights but may limit the generalizability of the results to other cultural or geographical settings. Future research could address this by exploring similar models across diverse contexts to enhance the applicability and robustness of the proposed sales leadership framework. Furthermore, temporal boundaries must be considered. The rapid evolution of social media implies that the strategies and applications discussed may become outdated as these platforms continue to develop. This temporal aspect necessitates ongoing research to keep pace with social media advancements.

**Scholarly Limitations:** The study's reliance on certain theoretical frameworks shapes the interpretation of data and may exclude alternative or complementary perspectives that could yield different insights. Exploring diverse theoretical frameworks in future studies could enrich understanding. Additionally, methodological constraints exist, as the research design and data collection methods influence the extent of the study's conclusions. The qualitative approach used here inherently involves subjective interpretations, which may impact the objectivity of the findings. Future research could mitigate this by incorporating mixed-methods or quantitative approaches for a more balanced analysis. The study's effort at interdisciplinary integration is also limited. While it draws on various disciplines to explore the intersection of social media and cultural tourism, it may overlook valuable insights from fields such as psychology or sociology. A more comprehensive interdisciplinary approach could yield richer and more nuanced findings.

Finally, the study's empirical evidence would benefit from further validation. Although current data support the recommendations, additional longitudinal or experimental research could provide stronger empirical backing and enhance the credibility of the conclusions. Addressing these limitations not only demonstrates scholarly rigor but also sets a foundation for future research to build upon. By broadening data sets, diversifying theoretical applications, and employing a range of methodological frameworks, future studies can deepen the understanding of social media's impact on cultural tourism marketing, continuously enriching this field of research.

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