

Unleashing the Power of Persuasion: Analyzing Instagram Persuasive Strategies for Promoting Sustainable Tourism in Bahrain

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Received: July 12, 2024

Accepted: April 8, 2025

Online Published: May 12, 2025

doi:10.11114/smc.v13i3.7695

URL: <https://doi.org/10.11114/smc.v13i3.7695>

Abstract

This study aimed to reveal whether the Bahrain Ministry of Tourism's (MOT) Instagram account had paid particular attention to promoting sustainable tourism and determining the persuasive strategies that MOT depended on to promote tourism in Bahrain. The study employed qualitative and quantitative content analysis for 108 posts over a year (from February 1, 2023, to February 28, 2024). The study revealed a low level of engagement with followers. Furthermore, although there were many newspaper articles regarding Bahrain's interest in sustainable practices, the percentage of sustainable tourism posts on the analyzed MOT's Instagram account was very low and came implicitly rather than explicitly. The results also showed that although many persuasive strategies have been incorporated into the MOT's Instagram account to promote tourism, there is a need to develop this area. The study recommended integrating four main pillars for promoting tourism in Bahrain through the MOT's official Instagram account. These pillars include raising the interactivity with the followers, unleashing the power of persuasion by incorporating more persuasive strategies based on the expectations of the target tourists, emphasizing sustainable tourism initiatives, and utilizing the latest technology in managing the MOT's Instagram account.

Keywords: persuasive strategies, sustainable tourism, social media, instagram, Bahrain

1. Introduction

Combining social media with persuasion provides a powerful way to promote tourism. In today's digital age, social media channels have become influential ways of communicating and making decisions. Using persuasive strategies on social media enables tourism organizations to engage with multiple travelers all over the world, shaping their opinions towards a specific destination and motivating them to explore new destinations. This combination of persuasion and social media leads to tourism growth and creates meaningful connections between global travelers. Additionally, it empowers tourism organizations to influence decision-making and generate positive outcomes for the tourism industry.

Effective persuasion through different social media platforms is crucial for promoting sustainable tourism. By using persuasive strategies that emphasize the positive impacts of sustainable tourism and its long-term benefits, such as preserving natural resources and supporting local communities, the official social media accounts of tourism organizations can motivate tourists to visit the promoted destinations. These efforts can contribute to a sustainable and responsible tourism industry. In this context, this study aims to analyze the official Instagram account of the Bahrain Ministry of Tourism (MOT) to identify the key persuasive strategies used to promote tourism in Bahrain in general, and sustainable tourism in particular.

1.1 Tourism in Bahrain

Tourism is considered one of the key elements of economic growth in the Gulf Cooperation Council countries (GCC). Bahrain, like other GCC economies, has highly depended on oil-related products for its economy during the past decades. But, over time, there will be a dire need to rely on other income sources such as tourism. In recent years, Bahrain has sought to "transform itself from a low-cost weekend destination for Gulf Arabs into an upscale family destination that also appeals to international tourists from beyond the Gulf" (Karolak, 2014, P.99). However, due to current competition from some other GCC countries, future economic growth in Bahrain may depend on further developing for the tourism sector.

Despite its small size (approximately 700 square kilometers), Bahrain has been a destination for visitors from Saudi Arabia since the construction of the King Fahd Causeway in 1986. Bahrain further expanded its tourism appeal by

hosting "Formula 1" races starting from 2004 until now (Mahate & Parahoo 2023). Additionally, Bahrain is seeking to benefit from its cultural heritage as a source of tourism income. Over a long period, Bahrain placed second among the GCC countries, after the UAE, in the entertainment tourism sector. However, this rank may decline because of the recent entertainment and cultural developments in Saudi Arabia. At the same time, while Bahrain has established itself as an entertainment destination for GCC tourists for decades, it still needs to put more effort into establishing itself as a preferred destination for tourists from outside the GCC countries (Alshurideh, 2019).

Over the past ten years, Bahrain has witnessed exponential growth in its tourism infrastructure sector because of its strategic location (Invest in Bahrain, 2020). It's worth noting that Bahrain has a strategic position as a global financial hub for the GCC countries, which affects the growth of its tourism sector. In addition, Bahrain's capital (Manama), was selected by the GCC tourism ministers to be the Gulf tourism capital for four years, from 2016 to 2020 (Chatterjee & Dsilva, 2021).

In general, Bahrain is famous for its diverse tourism offerings, with historical & cultural tourism being one of its most remarkable sectors. It has a rich history and a variety of archaeological sites, including Bahrain Castle, the UNESCO World Heritage Site and ancient burial mounds, museums that showcase the country's rich cultural heritage, and many other archaeological sites.

1.2 Sustainable Tourism in Bahrain

Sustainable tourism focuses on preserving ecological sustainability over the long run, fostering native cultures, and generating employment opportunities for local communities through tourism (Hysa, 2022). The World Tourism Organization defines sustainable tourism as "tourism that takes full account of its current and future economic, social and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of tourists, industry, the environment, and host communities" (Hysa et al., 2023 p.77).

In this context, the efforts of the Bahrain MOT in adopting sustainable tourism practices can be viewed as an attempt to be compatible with the future vision of the international tourism sector. According to Al Watan newspaper, Bahrain's approach regarding the sustainable tourism field focuses on promoting environmentally responsible tourism. These efforts include also adopting initiatives and applying effective procedures that align with "the Kingdom's commitments to carbon emissions reduction and achieving climate neutrality" (Alwatan newspaper, 2023, p.5). This approach is considered significant for enhancing the quality of life for all citizens, residents, and tourists.

1.3 Scope of the Study

It can be said that the image of tourist destinations plays a crucial role in tourism promotion. In this regard, many studies have shown a connection between sustainable tourism, tourists' intentions, and behavior during a specific destination (Nanang, 2023). Tourism promotion is significantly influenced by the role of social media platforms in shaping its image (Hartanto, 2022).

Posting sustainable tourism practices on various social media platforms can be considered a persuasive strategy for promoting tourism in any country. In this case, emphasizing commitment to cultural preservation, environmental conservation, and community empowerment, tourism promotion can attract travelers who prioritize responsible and ethical travel choices. Social media platforms, managed by official and private tourism institutions, can play a vital role in promoting tourism destinations by shaping the image of these destinations among the target visitors. In this case, these platforms provide an attractive vision of the unique features of any promoted destination. This could be done through sharing informative content, showcasing attractive landscapes, and engaging with followers. In summary, social media can be considered a powerful tool for promoting tourism by influencing potential tourists' perceptions and final decisions to visit a specific destination. In the same context, official social media platforms can promote tourism by applying various persuasion strategies. These strategies may include using persuasive language tone, attractive storytelling, social proof, and influencer testimonials. Consequently, this study aims to analyze the persuasive strategies used by the Bahrain MOT through its Instagram account to promote tourism in general and sustainable tourism in specific. In this regard, it is worth mentioning that limited studies have been conducted on using persuasive strategies on social media to promote tourism in the GCC generally, and in the Kingdom of Bahrain in particular, which increases the importance of this study.

2. Literature Review

2.1 The Role of Social Media in Promoting Tourism

Regarding the relationship between social media and tourism, many researchers confirmed the significance of social media in promoting tourism (Inversini, 2019). Previous studies have shown increasing numbers of individuals relying heavily on social media for gathering information about various types of tourism in many preferred destinations (Alzaydi & Elsharnouby 2023; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). In this regard, Dwivedi et al. revealed that social media

plays a significant role in shaping tourists' attitudes, intentions, and behavior (Dwivedi 2015). In the same vein, Chiwaridzo & Masengu (2023) found a positive relationship between social media use and promoting tourism generally, and green tourism in specific (Chiwaridzo & Masengu, 2023), which is considered a part of sustainable tourism.

In the same sequence, social media platforms enable tourism institutions to provide any required information to tourists to meet their entertainment needs (Vlasich, 2023). Furthermore, these platforms serve as e-tourism platforms, allowing tourism marketers to monitor and analyze tourists' behavior (Mukhopadhyay, 2023). In addition, marketing tourism on social media offers many advantages, including a high reach to targeted tourists, tourists' engagement, free professional campaigns, and user-friendliness (Choudhury & Mohanty, 2018).

It is worth mentioning that many studies have tried to examine the relationship between using social media and tourism promotion. These studies have addressed many perspectives. For example, some studies analyzed and evaluated social media platforms as promotion tools for different types of tourism (Sebastian, 2018), and others have focused on how social media users gather information related to some preferred destinations (Arminda & Sergio, 2018; Kennelly, 2017). Little studies have dealt with the relationship between social media and tourism promotion from the tourism providers' perspective (Nusair, 2022; Shen, 2021). For this reason, this current study adopted this perspective and tried to analyze how the Bahrain MOT uses its official Instagram account to promote tourism persuasively.

2.2 The Role of Social Media in Promoting Sustainable Tourism

Since the early 1980s, many researchers have examined sustainability as a crucial concern in the tourism industry. For example, Joo et al. found that sustainable tourism should be approached from many distinct perspectives, like respecting the pristine nature of local communities and ensuring that tourism doesn't hurt the local community. In addition, protecting resources and providing essential information to tourists on ecological and cultural values in destinations (Joo, 2020).

Other researchers argued that social media has a direct positive relation with the growth of sustainable tourism promotion (Firman, 2023). In this regard, social media can be used to share sustainable travel experiences (Schmallegger & Carson, 2008), influencing travelers' intentions and behavior toward a specific destination (Greenfield & Kim, 2019). In addition, enabling tourism marketing institutions to engage with tourists to promote sustainable tourism practices effectively (Jones, 2017). On the other hand, few studies have paid attention to using social media in presenting sustainable tourism initiatives, which creates a research gap in this area that needs to be filled by further studies (Hysa, 2022). For this reason, the current study aims to investigate whether the Bahrain MOT paid attention to sustainable tourism while promoting tourism through its Instagram account.

3. Theoretical Background

This study depends on the "Persuasion Knowledge Model" as its theoretical background. This model is one of the most significant theoretical approaches that was developed by Friestad and Wright in 1994 to understand persuasion in the marketing contexts (Chang-Dae & Kim, 2019). It aims to explain the persuasive strategies that can be used by marketers to influence consumer behavior. The model assumes that persuasive techniques and strategies progress over time, necessitating communicators and marketers to be usually aware of the latest techniques and strategies to achieve their communication objectives. (Zifei, & Cheng, 2020).

Based on this Model, persuasive communication involves the intersection of three distinct variables: the marketer's market experience, their cognitive abilities about the various facets of persuasive communication, and the stimulus processes employed to market their product (Jain & Purohit, 2022). The model confirms the significance of continually exploring the target audience's expectations (Waiguny et al., 2014) subjected to continuous changes (Ma et al., 2023). It also highlights that the persuasive communication process consists of three intersecting factors: the marketers' experience, persuasive skills, and the ability to create appealing content. This model also emphasizes the significant role of social and cultural variables in persuading and influencing the target audience (Ischen et al., 2022), which represents common reference points between communicators and target audiences in persuasive communication contexts. In addition, this model depends on exploring psychological variables necessary for understanding how persuasive techniques and strategies work in different communication contexts to persuade target audiences.

The current study depends on this model as its theoretical framework to explore and analyze the main persuasive strategies that Bahrain MOT employed through its Instagram account to persuade target tourists to visit Bahrain. Depending on this model will also enable the researcher to analyze the implicit and explicit persuasive strategies and suggest others for enhancing using social media to promote tourism persuasively and effectively.

4. Study Questions

Q1: What tourism types appeared on the Bahrain MOT's Instagram account during the study period?

Q2: Has the Bahrain MOT devoted particular attention to incorporating sustainable tourism into its Instagram account during the study period?

Q3: What are the types of persuasive strategies used by the Bahrain MOT on its Instagram account to promote tourism?

Q4: What are the main recommendations and suggestions to enhance tourism promotion on the Bahrain MOT's official Instagram account?

5. Methodology

To achieve the study aim, this research used content analysis as a remarkable method for analyzing social media posts. Content analysis also allows researchers to gain meaningful visions from these posts (Kusumowidagdo et al., 2023). It is suitable for analyzing all kinds of social media posts (textual and visual) to extract explicit and implicit meanings. In this regard, Bhagwat & Santosh (2022, P.251) defined content analysis as "a comprehensive technique for making valid inferences from texts or any other meaningful matter to the contexts of their use".

This study employed a mixture of qualitative and quantitative content analysis methods to analyze the Bahrain MOT's Instagram account (@tourismbh) for one year, starting from February 1, 2023, to February 28, 2024, with a total of 108 analyzed posts during this period. Generally, "Instagram posts are qualitative, yet content analysis depends on counting frequencies of coded characteristics, reporting quantitative analysis statistics" (Picardo et. al., 2020, P. 15). For this reason, using both qualitative and quantitative content analysis in this study was crucial to achieving the study goals.

As is known, qualitative analysis of Instagram posts focuses on uncovering implicit meanings that quantitative tools might miss. In addition, it delves into interpreting visual symbols like colors, reading between the lines in captions, and understanding indirect messages and hidden strategies. Thus, qualitative analysis provides meaningful insights that complement quantitative data, enabling a more comprehensive understanding of the platform's discourse and symbolic messages.

The current study relied on two content analysis tools (Social Blade and Rival IQ) to describe the quantitative content of the Bahrain MOT's analyzed Instagram platform during the study period, such as the followers' numbers, average comments and likes, engagement rate, most popular posts during the study period...etc. In parallel, the researcher used qualitative content analysis to analyze the implicit persuasive strategies that were employed to promote tourism in Bahrain and determine if these analyzed posts contained any indications of promoting sustainable tourism during the study period.

Generally, Instagram is a platform designed for sharing visual content in different types and forms (Syafganti et al., 2023), which makes it a suitable platform for tourism promotion (Elgammal, 2020). Furthermore, it is labeled as a platform for inspiration and imagination between users (Kilipiri et al., 2023), offering them a high level of interactivity and engagement with shared content.

Bahrain MOT has many social media platforms to promote tourism among the target audience. Among these platforms, the researcher chose only the Instagram account to implement this study as it presents itself as the most important guide to discovering tourism in the Kingdom of Bahrain. Another reason for choosing this platform was its increasing number of followers compared to the other social media platforms of the MOT. At the same time, MOT has other sub-Instagram platforms used also for the same purpose of promoting tourism in Bahrain. However, the chosen Instagram account (@tourismbh) has the highest number of followers. This platform targets both internal and external audiences while promoting tourism in Bahrain. Regarding internal tourism promotion, Instagram is considered the best platform for this purpose because it is the most widely used platform in Bahrain, as mentioned in 2023 by the Bahrain Telecommunication Regulatory Authority (tra.org.bh, 2024).

6. Results

6.1 The Description of the Bahrain MOT's Instagram Account

The Bahrain official Instagram platform presents content specialized in promoting many types of tourism and stunning visuals for ancient and modern life in Bahrain. As mentioned above, the total number of posts analyzed during the study period was 108 Instagram posts. These posts weren't published every day equally. Some days had no posts, while other days had multiple posts. The account utilizes both Arabic and English languages, indicating that the target tourists include citizens, residents, Arab and Gulf tourists, and international tourists as well.

Based on using the two content analysis tools (Social Blade and Rival IQ), the quantitative content description of the Bahrain MOT's Instagram account is as follows:

Based on using the Social Blade tool, and as seen in Table (1), the main quantitative description of the Bahrain MOT's Instagram account during the study period is as follows:

- The total number of followers was (91,988).
- (1,917) posts were the total posts that were uploaded on the Bahrain MOT's Instagram account during the study period.
- The average number of "comments per post" is (3.79), which represented only (.05%) of the total number of followers.
- The average number of "likes" per post was (153.38), with a percentage of (1.8%) of the total followers, which is considered very low.

Based on the above results, the overall "engaging rate per post" was (0.17), indicating a very low percentage of engagement with posts.

Table 1. Basic information about the Bahrain MOT's official Instagram account during the study period

Basic information	Detailed Statistics
Media Uploaded	1.907
Followers	91.998
Engagement Rate	0.17%
AVG likes	153.38
AVG comments	3.69

Source: Social Blade, 2024

- There were very weak responses to followers' comments and inquiries, resulting in a limited interactivity rate with the followers, which led to the decreased overall engagement rate on this account.

- Among the most used hashtags on the MOT's Instagram account during the study period, "#Here_in_Bahrain" was the highest hashtag that achieved the highest engagement rate during the study period, followed by "#BahrainOursYours".

As per Figure (1), the process of gaining new followers for the Bahrain MOT's Instagram account didn't progress at a consistent rate, which fluctuates frequently throughout different months. According to the "Social Bade" tool, the daily average of gaining followers was (54+), while the daily average of posting media was (+1) during the study period, raising questions concerning the ideal daily Instagram posts that can raise awareness of tourism in Bahrain among the target audiences.

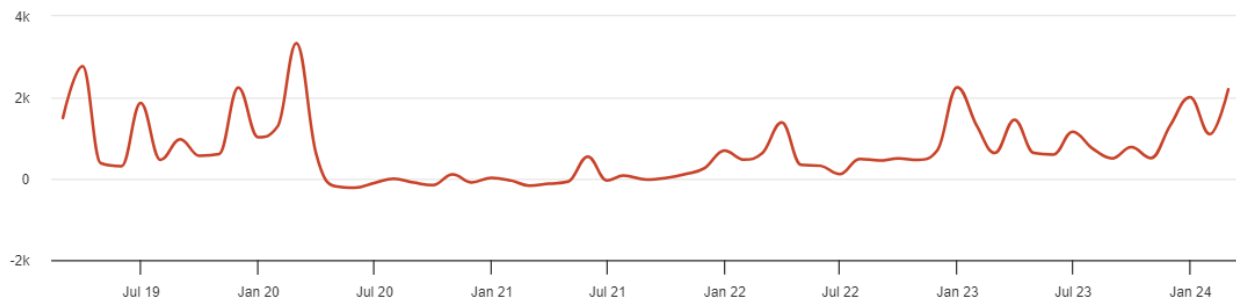


Figure 1. Monthly gained followers of Bahrain MOT's Instagram account

Source: This figure has been produced by using the Rival IQ tool, the free trial.

As highlighted in Figure (1), and according to the "Rival IQ" analyzing tool, the top-rated post on the analyzed Instagram account during the study period in terms of the "engagement rate by followers" was a post describing the luxury of the accommodation in the Four Seasons hotel in Bahrain. It was published on February 26, 2024, with an engagement rate of (0.37%). In the second rank was a post describing the preparation for Formula 1 in Bahrain. This post was published on February 28, 2024, with an engagement rate of (0.28%).

Based on figure (2), and according to the Rival IQ tool, the most visible posts type on the analyzed Instagram account were "photos" (with an average rate of 0.10 / day), followed by "reels" (0.07 / day), then "carousels" posts (0.03/ day). Although these percentages seemed to be very low, many studies confirmed that there isn't a specific number of posts that an Instagram platform should not exceed (Denniss et al., 2024; Elgammal, 2023) Instagram doesn't require a maximum or a minimum number of posts for any account. Instagram managers can post as frequently as they plan, adhering to strategic promotion plans they follow. However, it is commonly recommended to avoid overwhelming

followers with excessive use of posts, as it may lead to an undesirable reaction from some followers or decrease the total engagement rate. In the end, it is up to the Instagram manager to decide the frequency of uploaded posts based on the content strategy plan.

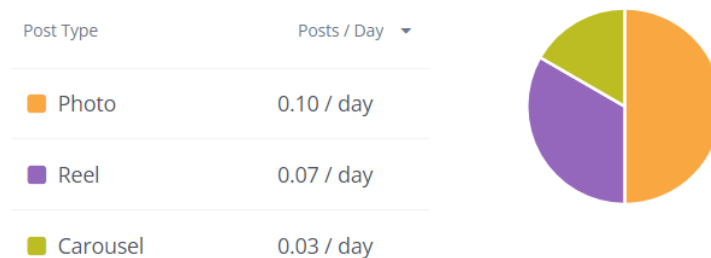


Figure 2. The average number of posts per day during the study period

Source: This figure has been produced by using the Rival IQ tool, the free trial.

Regarding the “average activity per published hour,” Figure (3) illustrates that the peak hours for published posts during the study period were 12:00 pm, 1:00 pm, 2:00 pm, and 7:00 pm. Many studies revealed that the best time to publish Instagram posts can differ depending on many factors, such as the target daily habits of the target followers and their geographic location. On the other hand, other studies suggest that the best time for posting on Instagram tends to be during weekend days, especially starting from 10 to 11 am, and early evening from 7:00 pm to 9:00 pm, as followers are more likely to be very active on Instagram (Metzler et al., 2022). Generally, it’s crucial to monitor Instagram’s analytics to decide the best scheduled times when the followers are most likely to be engaged with the Instagram posts.

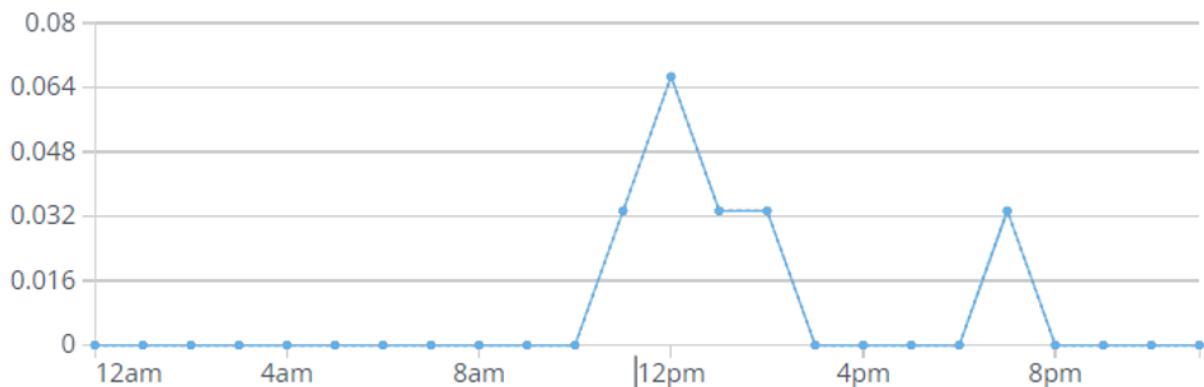


Figure 3. Average activity per published hour in the MOT's Instagram account during the study period

Source: This figure has been produced by using the Rival IQ tool, the free trial.

Figure (4) shows that the “average engagement rate per published hour” was highest at 11 am. In this regard, Barquero et al. detailed the factors affecting the average engagement rate per published hour on Instagram as follows: user interaction, post timing, publishing consistency, hashtags, content relevance, and algorithmic factors (Barquero Cabrero et al., 2023).

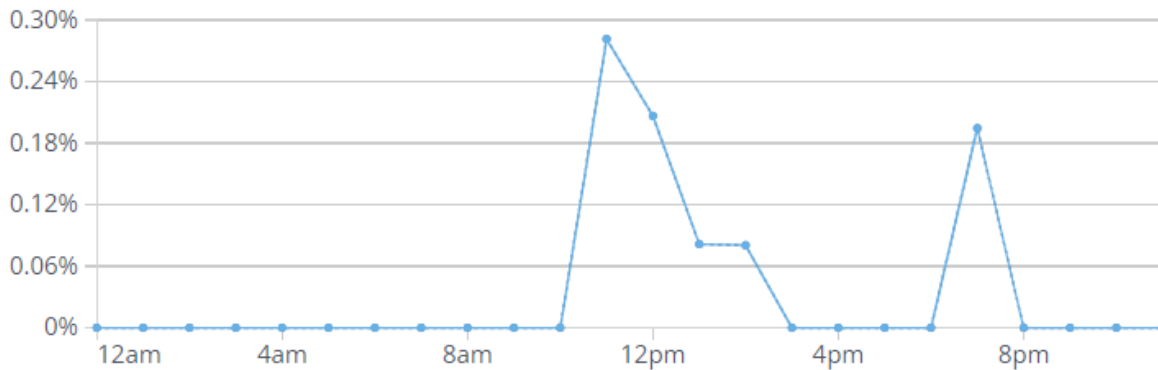


Figure 4. Average engagement rate per published hour

Source: This figure has been produced by using the Rival IQ tool, the free trial.

6.2 Analyzing the Posts` Content of the MOT's Instagram Account

6.2.1 Tourism Content Type on the MOT's Instagram Platform

Figure (5) shows that “cultural & heritage tourism” posts ranked first (23.2%) among other tourism content types on the analyzed MOT's Instagram account during the study period. These posts showed followers a fascinating journey through Bahrain's rich history and various cultural traditions. For example, one post reviewed “Bahrain Castle” as one of the most famous archaeological sites in Bahrain, and a UNESCO World Heritage Site, which allows followers to immerse themselves in Bahrain's history in an amazing way. Other posts concentrated on traditional crafts, cultural festivals, crowded local markets, and skilled artisans while making sculptures and unique handmade treasures.

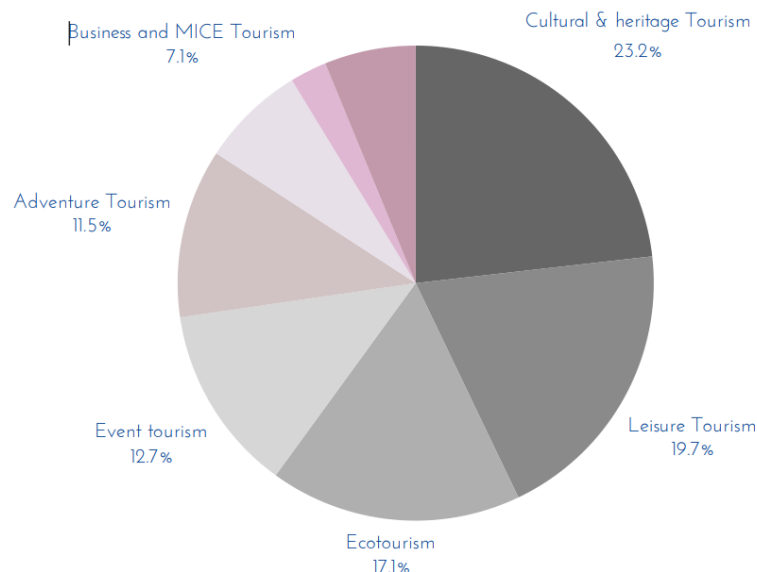


Figure 5. Tourism Content type on the MOT's Instagram during the study period

“Leisure Tourism” came in second rank among the other tourism types on MOT's Instagram during the study period (19.72%), providing world-class entertainment experiences in distinctive beaches, luxury resorts, modern shopping malls, dining scenes, and off-road adventures. Ecotourism" came in the third rank (17.14%), with posts showing Bahrain's natural landscapes, biodiversity, diving, and safaris. "Event tourism" ranked fifth (12.71%), with posts presenting various special events that can attract tourists like "The "formula 1 Bahrain Grand Prix", the "Bahrain International Airshow, the "Spring of Culture Festival" ...etc. Other tourism content types that appeared on the analyzed Instagram account comprises “adventure Tourism” (11.51%), “Business and MICE Tourism” (7.14%), “Tourist Destination Information” (2.51%), and others (institutions news, Awards, Wishes, etc.) (6.22%). It is worth mentioning that there weren't any posts regarding both “Religious” and “medical” tourism during the study period.

6.2.2 Tourism Posts Content on MOT's Instagram Account

Analyzing Instagram posts Content during the study period showed the following ranking (as seen in Figure (6): traditional clothing (32.61%), leisure activities (29.82%), archaeological sites (27.61%), people and lifestyle (22.13%), outdoor activities and adventure (19.32%), wildlife and plants (12.92%), "tourism facilities" (12.0%), arts (5.0%).

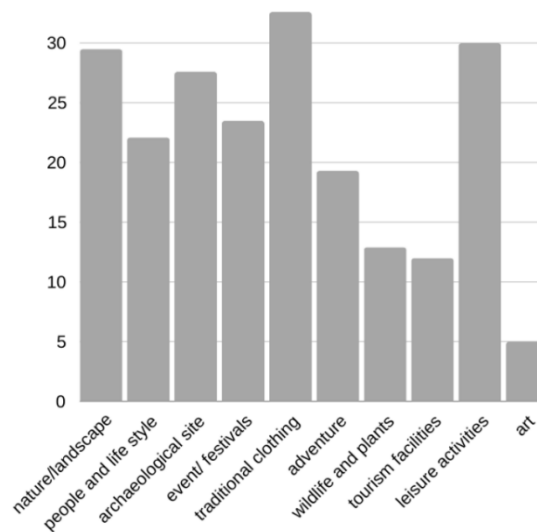


Figure 6. Tourism Post Content on the MOT's Instagram platform during the study period

Note: Each Instagram post is classified into more than one category based on the type of its content.

6.2.3 MOT's Instagram Persuasive Strategies for Promoting Sustainable Tourism

The analysis of MOT's Instagram posts revealed that sustainable tourism has not received sufficient attention from MOT, with a percentage of only (5.3%) of the total analyzed Instagram posts during the study period. These posts have implicitly addressed sustainable tourism through some indicators like describing the efforts undertaken for cultural Heritage preservation, promoting authentic local experiences, such as visiting traditional markets and engaging with local communities, and showcasing Bahrain's vibrant nature and landscapes. Based on these results, we can state that the Bahrain MOT relied on an implied marketing strategy for sustainable tourism. In this case, using this strategy to promote sustainable tourism in Bahrain seemed to be more authentic.

6.2.4 Persuasive Strategies Used on the MOT's Instagram Account

Qualitative content analysis of MOT's Instagram account revealed using several persuasion strategies, as highlighted in Figure (7).

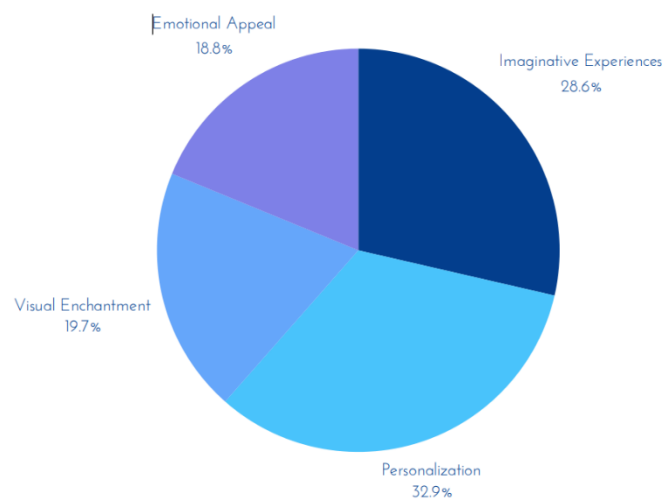


Figure 7. Persuasive Strategies used on MOT's Instagram based on the results of the Qualitative content analysis.

These persuasion strategies are as follows:

- “Personalization strategy” (32.91%): Through using a personalized addressing formula, aiming to establish direct connection and interactivity with each follower. In addition, using colloquial friendly styles in which followers are treated in a friendly manner.
- “Imaginative experiences strategy” (28.62%): By focusing on imaginative and fantastic experiences. This strategy appeared in posts showing heritage places, traditional crafts, clothes...etc.
- “Innovative visual content strategy” (19.74%): Through using impressive content, including captivating videos, breathtaking landscapes, fascinating choices of colors, and many other vibrant visuals.
- “Emotional appeal strategy” (18.81%): emphasizing the sense of relaxation, meditation, joy, purity of nature, inspiration, family gathering, and adventure that can be experienced in Bahrain in addition to using emotive language to play on followers’ feelings.

6.3 Suggestions for persuasive strategies to be embedded in the MOT’s Instagram account

Based on the above analysis of the MOT’s Instagram account, the following are some suggestive persuasive strategies that can be embedded into the Instagram posts to promote tourism in Bahrain effectively:

- “Incorporating buzzword in the digital content” strategy: using the most searched keywords related to tourism on search engines by the audience in the targeted countries. Many digital tools and websites can help in discovering these keywords like Google Trends for example.
- “Repetition” strategy: through reposting and resharing the same posts from time to time. This recycling can help in remembering the content and reinforcing the key messages.
- “Authentic User-Generated Content” Sharing: encouraging tourists who visited Bahrain to share their stories and repost this content on the MOT’s Instagram. This strategy can lead to building trust and authenticity with the target tourists.
- “Using Influencers and celebrities” strategy: employing famous social influencers and celebrities can increase the reach and exposure to the MOT’s Instagram account in addition to building trust with the target tourists.
- “Interactive persuasion” strategy: this strategy could be achieved through using interactivity tools with the target tourists on the MOT’s Instagram account by using interactive features like polls, questions, and quizzes to encourage audience interaction and involvement, which can lead to building trust with target tourists.
- “Sensory Appeal” strategy: through using stimuli like sounds, textures, and scents of historical and archaeological places, breathtaking landscapes, scenic beauty, and fresh air...etc. In addition to using colors of nature strategically, this can lead to capturing the tourists’ attention and interactivity with this content.

Incorporating the above strategies into the Bahrain MOT’s Instagram account can lead to capturing the attention of the target tourists, building trust and credibility with them, and encouraging them to visit Bahrain.

6.4 Suggestions for Promoting Sustainable Tourism in Bahrain

Based on the above result regarding the low percentage used for promoting sustainable tourism promotion on the MOT’s Instagram account, the researcher suggests embedding the following practices into the MOT’s Instagram posts to promote sustainable tourism persuasively:

- Eco-friendly Accommodations: through promoting the eco-friendly hotels and resorts that already exist in Bahrain.
- The Bahrain governmental efforts aim to achieve net-zero carbon emissions by the year 2060 (Mashreq, 2024).
- Efforts have been made by the Bahrain National Initiative for Agricultural Development since 2010 to increase green spaces and support agricultural manufacturing industries (Bahrain SDGs., 2024).
- Sharing successful stories about sustainable practices in Bahrain like diving with eco-certified operators, sustainable food options in many restaurants and cafes in Bahrain, and people participating in beach clean-ups.

Notably, promoting sustainable tourism on Bahrain MOT’s Instagram account by highlighting the sustainable initiatives and practices can be considered an effective persuasive strategy that can attract those who are interested in responsible tourism.

7. Conclusion and Discussion

This study aimed to reveal whether the Bahrain MOT paid special attention to promoting sustainable tourism on its official Instagram account. Furthermore, it aimed also to analyze the most apparent persuasive strategies used through the same Instagram platform to promote tourism generally. The study proceeded from the common-sense assumption that promoting sustainable tourism through MOT’s Instagram account could be an appropriate persuasive strategy for

those interested in responsible tourism. In this regard, the study depended on quantitative and qualitative content analyses conducted for the Bahrain MOT's Instagram account (108 posts) for one year.

The study concluded that there was a very weak percentage of engagement with the followers (0.17%), which means that it is important to adopt engagement practices to increase this percentage. This could be achieved through publishing engaging content, answering the followers' queries, using personalized replies, creating compelling content, answering direct messages, posting consistently, and optimizing post timing based on Instagram insights analytics.

The content analysis revealed that "cultural / heritage" tourism took the top spot for the most prominent tourism type on the Bahrain MOT's Instagram platform, followed by "leisure tourism", "ecotourism", and "event tourism", which confirm that local archaeology and culture are the main pillars of tourism in Bahrain.

Although there were many published articles regarding Bahrain's interest in sustainable practices, as highlighted above, the percentage of sustainable tourism posts on the analyzed MOT's Instagram account was very low (5.3% of total analyzed posts). Furthermore, these posts came implicitly through showcasing some responsible practices in Bahrain. Considering the increasing international interest in sustainable tourism, it is suggested that MOT should pay more attention to promoting it based on the responsible initiatives that already exist in Bahrain. In this case, incorporating sustainable tourism into Instagram marketing for tourism in Bahrain could be considered an effective persuasive strategy to attract those interested in responsible and sustainable tourism.

Despite the content analysis results revealing that many persuasive strategies were embedded in these MOT's Instagram posts to promote tourism in Bahrain, there is still a desperate need to incorporate more persuasive strategies in this account to be more effective. In this case, studying the main characteristics of the target tourists will serve as a cornerstone in choosing the best persuasion strategies to promote tourism in Bahrain. For this reason, unleashing the power of persuasion through selecting the best persuasion strategies will be the most likely choice to promote tourism in Bahrain through the official Instagram account of MOT.

The study relied on the Persuasion Knowledge Model, which presented a comprehensive framework of how marketers and communicators can use persuasion messages strategically. This framework helped the researcher in revealing the most prominent persuasive strategies on the analyzed account in addition to suggesting other strategies that can help the MOT's Instagram managers while promoting tourism in Bahrain.

8. Recommendations and Future Studies

Besides the above recommendations to enhance interactivity and persuasive content through Bahrain MOT's Instagram account to promote tourism, it is essential to leverage the latest technology to achieve the same goal. The appropriate technology for this purpose could be using 360-degree photos and live videos for an immersive experience, Augmented reality (AR) to allow users to overlay many digital elements onto their videos and photos, live videos to offer real-time engagement, and AI in promoting tourism through analyzing data and determine targeted tourists' preferences and the prominent keywords they use in the traveling context. Generally, incorporating technology into social media for tourism promotion still needs further studies, especially in light of the ever-changing technology that affects tourism.

Based on the above results, the study suggests that future studies in the research can focus on the following:

- Using AI technologies in social media to promote sustainable tourism.
- The role of the Unique Selling Proposition in social media to promote internal and external tourism.
- Exploring the variables that affect using persuasion in the tourism promotion contexts.
- Evaluating the use of social media platforms in promoting Sustainable Tourism in terms of Best Practices and Future Strategies.
- Examining variables that affect the audience's perception of destinations in light of responsible tourism.
- The Role of User-Generated Content in promoting Sustainable Tourism on social media in the GCC countries.
- The Impact of Social Media Persuasion Strategies on Tourists' Decision-Making Process: A Comparative Analysis of Different Platforms.
- Evaluating the Role of Social Media Interactivity in Persuasive Tourism Promotion through the official tourism Instagram accounts.
- The role of AI technology in managing social media platforms specialized in promoting tourism.
- Exploring the use of Metaverse in Tourism Promotion as a persuasion strategy: The challenges and opportunities.
- The Role of AI-Generated Content in Persuading Tourists: A Study of Chatbot-Generated Reviews and Recommendations.

Acknowledgments

Not applicable.

Authors contributions

Dr. Naglaa Elgammal was responsible for conducting this research as the only author.

Funding

Not applicable.

Competing interests

Not applicable.

Informed consent

Obtained.

Ethics approval

The Publication Ethics Committee of the Redfame Publishing.

The journal's policies adhere to the Core Practices established by the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE).

Provenance and peer review

Not commissioned; externally double-blind peer reviewed.

Data availability statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to privacy or ethical restrictions.

Data sharing statement

No additional data are available.

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