

Determinants of Social Media Usage and Their Role in Enhancing Business Performance: Evidence from Medical Tourism Service Providers

Déterminants de l'usage des médias sociaux et leur rôle dans l'amélioration de la performance des entreprises : le cas des prestataires de services du tourisme médical

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Abstract

This research examines the antecedents and performance outcomes of social media use in the medical tourism sector, drawing on the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), the Technology–Organization–Environment (TOE) framework, and the Resource-Based View (RBV). Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) was employed to validate the proposed conceptual model. Data were collected through an online survey administered to 133 medical service providers in Tunisia. The results show that information intensity and perceived usefulness have a significant positive effect on social media usage, while perceived ease of use does not exhibit a significant influence. In addition, social media usage positively affects the marketing performance of medical tourism providers. This study highlights the importance of evaluating social media adoption from a managerial perspective. For professionals in the medical tourism industry, optimizing social media strategies can enhance marketing performance and strengthen competitive positioning.

Keywords: social media use; information intensity; perceived usefulness; marketing performance; medical tourism providers; Tunisia

Résumé

Cette recherche vise à examiner les antécédents et les effets sur la performance de l'usage des médias sociaux dans le secteur du tourisme médical, en s'appuyant sur le modèle d'acceptation des technologies (TAM), le cadre Technologie–Organisation–Environnement (TOE) et l'approche basée sur les ressources (RBV). Une modélisation par équations structurelles fondée sur la méthode des moindres carrés partiels (PLS-SEM) a été utilisée pour valider le modèle conceptuel proposé. Les données ont été collectées via une enquête en ligne administrée auprès de 133 prestataires de services médicaux en Tunisie. Les résultats montrent que l'intensité de l'information et l'utilité perçue exercent un effet positif significatif sur l'usage des médias sociaux, tandis que la facilité d'utilisation perçue n'a pas d'influence significative. De plus, l'usage des médias sociaux améliore positivement la performance marketing des prestataires de tourisme médical. Cette étude souligne l'importance d'évaluer l'adoption des médias sociaux sous un angle managérial. Pour les professionnels du tourisme médical, l'optimisation des stratégies sur les médias sociaux peut améliorer la performance marketing et renforcer le positionnement concurrentiel.

Mots-clés : usage des médias sociaux; intensité de l'information; utilité perçue; performance marketing; prestataires de tourisme médical; TAM ; TOE ; RBV

Introduction

Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs), particularly the Internet, represent a key driver of transformation in the medical tourism industry, significantly affecting the sector's supply, demand, and intermediaries (Ayuningtyas & Ariwibowo, 2020). The Internet provides a platform that enables consumers to access health-related information and medical services worldwide. It also facilitates direct connections with healthcare providers, improves communication between patients and intermediaries (Gu et al., 2021), and offers a wide range of medical destinations. Therefore, the growth of the medical tourism sector is largely attributable to the increasing availability of web-based resources (Lunt et al., 2012).

In this context, the relevance and quality of information play a critical role in tourists' decision-making regarding medical tourism services (Raoofi, 2024). To reduce uncertainty about healthcare abroad, patients actively seek information, with online search being the most popular method (Demir et al., 2024). Online sources include medical tourism websites, virtual communities where people share experiences, blogs authored by previous medical tourists (Kim, 2016), and social media platforms, which provide additional insights into medical tourism destinations (Najar et al., 2025).

Social media, therefore, plays a crucial role in the development of the medical tourism industry. Their global popularity has grown since the 1990s (Campbell et al., 2013), driven by technological development, ease of use, fast connectivity, and widespread Internet coverage (Zhou & Wang, 2014). Many medical tourism service providers now leverage these platforms to optimize their marketing strategies. They use social media to seek and disseminate information about sector facilitators, healthcare staff, destinations, service quality, and waiting times (Medhekar, 2017).

Social media enables companies to promote their offerings, communicate in real-time with a global audience, and receive immediate feedback while using minimal resources (Yuceer et al., 2024). It also allows them to enhance customer relationship management, adapt multichannel communication, increase advertising flexibility, and reduce operational costs (Afren, 2024). Social media has proven to be an effective tool for marketing tourism products and promoting destinations in various countries (Foroughi & Karaman, 2025).

However, despite the increasing adoption of social media by medical tourism providers, there is still a notable gap in research assessing its impact on organizational performance (Najar et al., 2025). Existing studies have largely concentrated on consumer-oriented dimensions, such

as patient behavior and electronic word-of-mouth (Cherukuri, 2024), while the perspective of service providers remains insufficiently explored. This study makes three main contributions by addressing theoretical, methodological, and managerial gaps in the existing literature.

To fully understand the strategic potential of social media, it is therefore important to investigate the factors driving its adoption by companies and its effects on marketing performance. Specifically, this study aims to identify (1) the antecedents of social media usage in the marketing strategies of medical tourism service providers, and (2) the consequences of social media usage on their business performance.

Accordingly, the research problem guiding this study is formulated as follows:

What are the key determinants of social media usage by medical tourism service providers, and how does it affect their marketing performance?

In the subsequent sections of this research, a concise review of the literature is presented and hypotheses are formulated, followed by a detailed description of the methodology. The results are then analyzed and discussed in relation to the existing body of knowledge. Finally, the conclusion outlines the theoretical and managerial implications of the study, along with its limitations and suggestions for future research.

1. Conceptual framework

To better understand the motivations underlying social media adoption, this study integrates the TAM, TOE, and RBV frameworks in a complementary manner. Building on the Technology–Organization–Environment framework (Tornatzky & Fleischman, 1990), information intensity emerged from the qualitative phase as a contextual factor shaping the conditions under which medical tourism providers adopt digital tools. At the perceptual level, the Technology Acceptance Model (Davis, 1989; Yu & Tao, 2009) helps explain individual evaluations of technology, highlighting perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use as key drivers of social media usage. Complementing these perspectives, the Resource-Based View (Barney, 1991; Wernerfelt, 1984) positions social media capabilities as strategic resources that can enhance organizational performance. Together, these frameworks capture the organizational conditions (TOE), perceptual determinants (TAM), and strategic value (RBV) that jointly influence social media adoption in the medical tourism sector.

1.1. Drivers of Social Media Adoption among Medical Tourism Providers

Information intensity refers to “*the extent to which information is embedded in a firm’s product or service*” (Thong, 1999). It reflects the central role of information in value creation and varies significantly across industries (Porter & Millar, 1985). Firms operating in highly information-intensive sectors are therefore more likely to adopt information technologies (IT), as these technologies enhance the management, accessibility, and dissemination of critical information. Prior research confirms that both the type of business and its information intensity are major determinants of IT adoption (Massini et al., 2024), while Thompson et al. (1998) demonstrate that information intensity significantly influences corporate Internet use.

In the tourism sector, information is a fundamental component of the tourism product, driving perceptions, trust, destination choice, and booking decisions. As tourism is an intangible service industry, consumers rely heavily on accessible and reliable information prior to consumption (Sigala, 2021). Social media, empowered by Web 2.0 capabilities, facilitate the instant and global dissemination of content, thereby increasing the visibility of destinations and enabling information accessibility *anytime, anywhere, and by anyone* (Lee, 2011).

Thus, as highlighted by Porter and Millar (1985), information intensity represents a key indicator of a sector’s digitalization potential. In the case of medical tourism—where decisions depend greatly on trustworthy information about medical services, accreditation, costs, and safety—information intensity is particularly high, reinforcing the need to integrate digital technologies, especially social media, into providers’ strategies.

Based on these theoretical assumptions, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H1: Information intensity positively influences the adoption of social media by medical tourism providers.

Perceived usefulness, within the TAM framework, refers to “*the extent to which decision-makers expect benefits from using a new technology*” (Yu & Tao, 2009). It expresses the belief that social media can improve firms’ marketing performance (Cao & Weerawardena, 2023).

Extensive research has shown that perceived usefulness is a major determinant of technology adoption. It strongly influences attitudes and behavioral intentions toward new technologies (Davis, 1989), with its effect being significantly stronger than that of perceived ease of use (Davis, 1993). Technologies are often rejected if users do not perceive clear benefits, even when they are easy to use (Davis, Bagozzi & Warshaw, 1992).

Meta-analytic evidence also identifies perceived usefulness as one of the most central predictors of IT adoption at both the individual and organizational levels (Zou et al., 2025). Several studies confirm its positive influence on social media use across different contexts, including business and marketing (Dwivedi et al., 2021; Zou et al., 2025 ; Najar & Maghraoui, 2024 ; Najar et al., 2025). In particular, perceived usefulness is considered a key driver for SMEs' adoption of social media and e-marketing tools (Najar et al., 2025 ; Bashir et al., 2022 ; Najar & Zaiem, 2018).

In the medical tourism industry, where interaction with international patients depends heavily on online communication, social media provide essential features such as search tools, booking systems and online assistance (Cherukuri, 2024; Ahmed, 2023).

Accordingly, we propose the following hypothesis:

H2: Perceived usefulness positively influences the adoption of social media by medical tourism providers.

Perceived ease of use refers to "*the extent to which firms believe that using a new technology will be effortless*" (Yu & Tao, 2009). Efforts may relate to monetary investments, employee training, switching costs, and maintenance requirements (Dahnil et al., 2014).

Prior studies have confirmed that perceived ease of use is a key determinant of social media adoption in various contexts (Abdul Razak & Bin Md Latip, 2016). For example, Sago (2013) found that ease of use positively influences students' adoption of Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, and Google+. Similarly, Lee et al. (2013) highlighted its importance in social media usage within professional associations, and Choi and Chung (2013) identified it as a driver of blog usage.

The widespread adoption of Web 2.0 by tourism organizations can be explained by its accessibility and cost efficiency (Ammirato, 2010). Social media tools require relatively low investment and offer continuous availability without geographical limitations (Easen, 2009; Lee & Wicks, 2010; Michaelidou et al., 2011). Buvár and Gáti, (2023) also demonstrated that perceived ease of use significantly influences e-marketing adoption among small tourism organizations.

Additionally, ease of use has consistently been recognized as a major determinant of attitudes toward technology (Davis, 1989; Dwivedi et al., 2021; Bashir et al., 2022). When social media platforms are easy to navigate, they can enhance users' overall experience (Baj-Rogowska, & Sikorski, 2023), including interactions between medical professionals and patients in the

medical tourism context. Htibat et al., (2024) further confirmed that ease of use encourages SMEs to utilize social media for marketing purposes.

Based on this rationale, we propose the following hypothesis:

H3: Perceived ease of use positively influences the adoption of social media by medical tourism providers.

1.2. Social Media Performance among Medical Tourism Providers

The qualitative content analysis revealed several indicators related to marketing or market performance. To assess the value generated by social media use, this research adopts the Resource-Based View (RBV), which posits that firm performance results from the effective deployment of valuable, rare, and inimitable resources and capabilities.

In the context of medical tourism, social media represent a strategic digital resource that can enhance firms' competitive advantage by improving visibility, international reach, patient engagement, and reputation management. Therefore, evaluating the performance outcomes of social media usage allows us to determine whether such digital capabilities contribute to better marketing results for medical tourism providers.

A substantial body of research highlights the role of social media as a strategic driver of value creation and organizational performance. Prior studies confirm that the adoption of digital technologies leads to positive performance outcomes (Bindeeba et al., 2025; Grijalba et al., 2025 ; Shuai & Wu, 2011). Within the tourism sector, the benefits of social media are reflected in increased brand awareness, greater consumer engagement, and enhanced brand trust (Alghamdi & Abdulwahid (2025).

Findings from Parveen et al. (2015), based on a qualitative investigation of organizations using social media, show that these tools contribute to performance improvement in several key areas, including customer relationship management, service quality, brand visibility, information sharing, and marketing cost reduction. Supporting this view, social media communication has been shown to strengthen marketing operations (Dwivedi et al., 2022), improve customer satisfaction (Boukhaoua & Habbache, 2024) and enhance overall marketing performance (Najar et al., 2025).

In tourism specifically, the use of social media helps improve service quality and fosters higher visitor satisfaction (Tazir & Ouahab, 2025). In the context of medical tourism, user-generated

content—such as reviews and recommendations from former medical tourists—strongly influences destination image and potential travelers' purchase intentions. Therefore, online content plays a crucial role in strengthening the performance of medical tourism providers (Kim, 2016).

Based on these arguments, the following hypothesis and sub-hypotheses can be proposed:

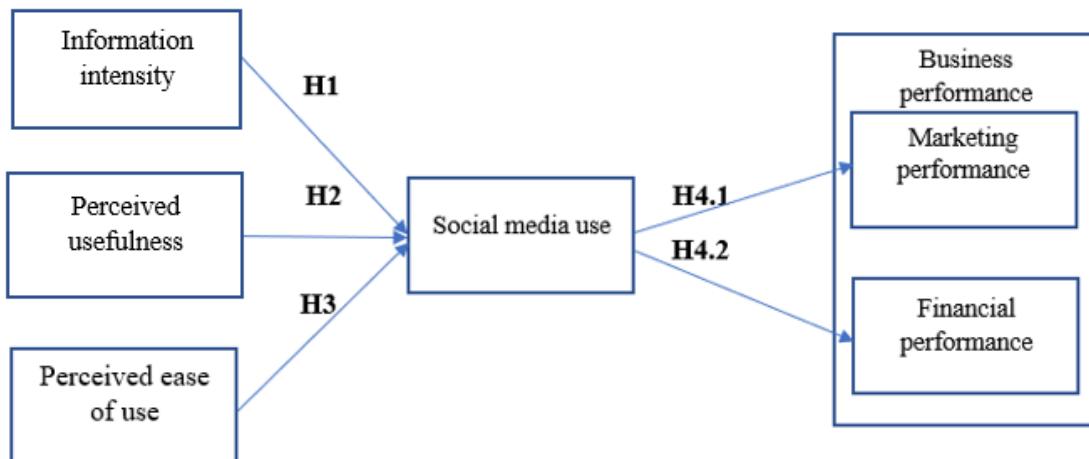
H4: Social media use positively influences the business performance of medical tourism service providers.

H4.1 : Social media use positively influences the marketing performance of medical tourism service providers.

H4.2 : Social media use positively influences the financial performance of medical tourism service providers.

Drawing on the above hypotheses, we test the research model illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Conceptual model



2. Research methodology

A quantitative approach was adopted, using an online questionnaire to gather detailed information on the factors driving social media use and its impact on the marketing performance of companies in the medical tourism sector. The study's constructs were measured using five-point Likert scales ("Strongly disagree" to "Strongly agree") for their psychometric reliability (Frikha, 2019). Social media usage was assessed using Jayachandran et al.'s (2005) scale as adopted by Trainor (2014), information intensity was adapted from Thompson et al.

(1998), perceived usefulness from Iddris and Ibrahim (2015), perceived ease of use from Siamagka et al. (2015), and company performance from Sin et al. (2005).

The scales were back-translated twice to ensure consistency with the original versions. The study targeted professionals operating in Tunisia's medical tourism sector, including both tour operators—who act as key intermediaries between foreign patients and medical service providers—and clinics, which form the core of the medical service offerings. Data were collected using a convenience sampling approach to facilitate participation, accessibility, and availability. A total of 133 professionals participated, yielding a response rate of 76%. The respondents represented a diverse range of organization types, including aesthetic centers, ophthalmology clinics, multidisciplinary clinics, and tour operators, with varying levels of experience in the sector. (Golzar et al., 2022).

The study used Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) with PLS estimation in SmartPLS 3, suitable for evaluating theoretical models with relatively small samples (Hair et al., 2021). A two-step approach was adopted: first, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to ensure reliability and validity of the measurement model, followed by testing the structural model to evaluate all hypotheses.

3. Results and discussion

The measurement model confirmed acceptable psychometric properties. Composite reliability coefficients exceeded 0.7, and all AVEs were above 0.5, indicating good convergent validity (Hair et al., 2021). The square roots of AVEs were higher than inter-construct correlations, and factor loadings were greater on their respective constructs than on others, supporting discriminant validity (Hair et al., 2021; Henseler, 2016) (Table 1).

Table 1. Result of convergent validity

Construct	Scale Length	CR	AVE
Information intensity	3	0,970	0,915
Perceived usefulness	2	0,974	0,950
Perceived ease to use	3	0,814	0,566
Social media use	5	0,937	0,751
Marketing performance	3	0,961	0,893
Financial performance	4	0,942	0,804

All model fit indices exceeded the recommended threshold of $R^2 > 0.26$ (Wetzel et al., 2009). Additionally, all Q^2 values were positive, confirming the model's predictive relevance (Hair et al., 2021) (Table 2). The overall Goodness-of-Fit (GOF) index reached 0.6012, indicating a strong global model fit (Wetzel et al., 2009).

Table 2. Model fit

Latent construct	R2	Q2
Social media use	0,670	0,549
Marketing performance	0,615	0,581
Financial performance	0,465	0,308

To assess the relationships among latent variables, we analyzed standardized path coefficients (β) and their significance using a non-parametric bootstrapping procedure, which provides Student's t -values for hypothesis testing (Table 3).

Table 3. Hypotheses Testing

Hypothesis	Regression coefficient	T test	P values	Results
H1 : Information intensity → Social media use	0,312	4,589	0,000	Supported
H2 : Perceived usefulness → Social media use	0,515	8,288	0,000	Supported
H3 : Perceived ease of use → Social media use	-0,125	1,705	0,088	Not supported
H4.1 : Social media use → Marketing performance	0,212	1,680	0,0009	supported
H4.2 : Social media use → Financial performance	0,208	1,380	0,1677	Not supported

The results confirm H1, showing that information intensity has a significant positive effect on Social media use. This finding is consistent with prior research suggesting that higher levels of information intensity encourage the adoption of ICTs (Porter & Miller, 1985) and enhance the use of social media as an efficient channel for instant and global information dissemination (Massini et al., 2024). Social media platforms enable medical tourism companies to share

relevant content that supports tourists in planning their trips and making informed decisions regarding destinations and service choices (Cherukuri, 2024).

Regarding H2, Perceived usefulness appears as the strongest predictor of Social media use. These findings are consistent with prior research demonstrating that perceived usefulness strongly influences social media adoption (Bashir et al., 2022; Asghar et al., 2023; Buvár & Gáti, 2023). As discussed earlier, medical tourism services are characterized by high information intensity. Accordingly, professionals perceive social media as a valuable tool that enables them to efficiently share rich content—such as photos, videos, and promotional messages—while engaging with potential, current, and former medical tourists. Khan et al. (2021) further argue through the TAM framework that perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use are key determinants of social media adoption among healthcare professionals.

In addition, social media platforms provide medical tourism providers with a strategic space to highlight the expertise of surgeons and medical staff and to promote their services without facing major regulatory constraints. For instance, In Tunisia, advertising of medical procedures through mass media or social networks is legally and ethically restricted: the national medical order forbids any direct or indirect promotional content by healthcare professionals, in compliance with the medical code of ethics (CNOM, 2025), making social media an appealing alternative communication channel for the sector.

Regarding hypothesis H3, which posited that perceived ease of use positively influences social media use, the results did not provide empirical support for this relationship. One possible explanation is that, in the Tunisian context, social media platforms are widely and routinely used and generally perceived as easy to use, which reduces variability in ease-of-use perceptions and makes ease of use a taken-for-granted factor. As a result, ease of use becomes less of a differentiating factor in adoption decisions. Prior studies similarly suggest that when users are already familiar with a technology, perceived ease of use becomes less influential than perceived usefulness or strategic benefits (Venkatesh & Davis, 2000; Al-Busaidi, 2017). In the context of medical tourism, professionals may therefore prioritize the value and outcomes associated with social media—such as visibility, customer engagement, and competitiveness—over usability considerations.

For H4, the results show a partial positive effect of social media use on firm performance, consistent with prior research highlighting its positive impact on organizational outcomes

(Parveen et al., 2010; Shuai & Wu, 2011), medical tourism providers (Najar et al., 2025), as well as customer trust and loyalty (Pergolino et al., 2012; Ling Chan & Denizci Guillet, 2011). However, no significant effect was observed on financial performance, likely because Tunisian medical tourism companies have not yet fully exploited social media to generate revenue or increase market share, due to delayed adoption or suboptimal use. As noted by Abu Bashar et al. (2024), social media provides a competitive advantage only when used effectively and innovatively. Moreover, its financial impact may be indirect and realized over the long term (Chatterjee et al., 2021; Najar & Maghraoui, 2025), with Tunisia's market characteristics potentially shaping how social media influences economic outcome (Najar et al., 2025).

Conclusion

This study aimed to examine the adoption and use of social media in the medical tourism sector and its impact on firm performance, adopting both theoretical and practical perspectives. The results indicate that social media use positively affects marketing performance, particularly in terms of customer satisfaction, trust, and loyalty. However, financial performance gains appear to be indirect and may materialize only over the long term. These findings suggest that social media contributes primarily to relationship-oriented outcomes, reinforcing the importance of strategic digital engagement for firms operating in this sector.

Theoretically, the study enriches the literature by proposing a novel conceptual framework that integrates social media adoption, information intensity, and marketing performance in a sector that combines health and tourism. Unlike prior research focusing mainly on consumer behavior, this study emphasizes firm-centered strategic marketing, highlighting how the perceived usefulness of social media and the intensity of information sharing influence adoption decisions and marketing outcomes. This framework can serve as a basis for future studies investigating the mechanisms through which digital tools affect firm performance in specialized service sectors.

From a managerial perspective, the findings provide actionable insights for professionals in the medical tourism sector. Social media platforms enable firms to communicate effectively with potential, current, and former patients, share rich and engaging content, and strengthen long-term customer relationships. Managers are encouraged to prioritize tools and strategies that maximize engagement and perceived usefulness, adapt content to their target audiences, and

leverage social media to enhance visibility, trust, and loyalty. By doing so, firms can improve marketing performance and reinforce their competitiveness both locally and internationally.

This study has several limitations. The sample was relatively small and focused on the Tunisian context, which may limit the generalizability of the findings. Future research should expand the sample, include additional variables such as firm reputation, export strategies, or digital marketing capabilities, and consider international contexts to provide a more comprehensive understanding of social media's impact on medical tourism performance. Longitudinal studies could also explore the evolution of social media's effects on both marketing and financial outcomes over time.

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