

**The Influence Of Social Media On Domestic Tourism Choices Among Ugandans: A Case Study Of Jinja District In Eastern Uganda**

**Bahiyyah Ahmad<sup>1</sup>, Kamugira Apophia<sup>2</sup>**

**1, 2 Metropolitan International University**

**Abstract**

*This study examined the influence of social media on domestic tourism choices among Ugandans, with a specific focus on Jinja District in Eastern Uganda. The study was guided by objectives to determine the influence of social media content on destination awareness, to assess the role of user-generated content in shaping tourism destination selection, and to evaluate the effect of social media marketing by tourism businesses on tourist visitation decisions. A cross-sectional survey design was used. A sample of 160 respondents comprising domestic tourists, tourism enterprise owners, and tourism promotion officers was selected using stratified and purposive sampling techniques. Questionnaires and interview guides were used for data collection. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, Pearson's correlation, and multiple linear regression. Results indicate that social media content ( $\beta=0.436$ ,  $p<0.01$ ), user-generated content ( $\beta=0.352$ ,  $p<0.01$ ), and social media marketing ( $\beta=0.301$ ,  $p<0.05$ ) significantly influence domestic tourism destination choices, with the model explaining 63.4% of the variance ( $R^2=0.634$ ,  $F(3,156)=90.12$ ,  $p<0.001$ ). The study recommends that Uganda Tourism Board, district tourism offices, and tourism businesses enhance their social media presence, content quality, and engagement strategies to attract more domestic tourists to Jinja and similar destinations.*

**Keywords: Social media, domestic tourism, destination choice, user-generated content, tourism marketing, Jinja District, Uganda, digital tourism**

**1.0 Background to the Study**

Domestic tourism, defined as travel by residents within their own country, has been increasingly recognized as a critical component of national tourism strategies and economic development plans worldwide (Moses et al., 2025). In many developing countries, international tourism has historically dominated policy attention and investment, while the immense potential of domestic tourism to stimulate local economies, foster national identity, and redistribute income has been underutilized (Ahumuza et al., 2025). Uganda, endowed with extraordinary natural resources including the source of the Nile River, mountain gorilla habitats, expansive national parks, and diverse cultural heritage sites, possesses significant potential to develop a thriving domestic tourism sector (Christopher & Felex, 2022).

The emergence of social media platforms has fundamentally transformed how people discover, research, plan, and share travel experiences. Platforms including Facebook, Instagram, Twitter (now X), TikTok, YouTube, and WhatsApp have become primary channels through which travel content is produced, consumed, and disseminated (Sophie & Crispus, 2024). Social media enables real-time information sharing, authentic peer-to-peer travel reviews, visually compelling destination content, and interactive engagement between tourists, tourism

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businesses, and destination marketing organizations(A. I. Kazaara & Nancy, 2026). These features have collectively made social media a powerful force in shaping travel decisions globally.

Jinja District, located approximately 80 kilometers east of Kampala, is one of Uganda's premier tourism destinations, historically significant as the location of the source of the River Nile at Owen Falls(Julius et al., 2024). The district offers a rich portfolio of tourism attractions including adventure activities (white-water rafting, kayaking, bungee jumping), cultural heritage sites, local cuisine experiences, the Bujagali Falls area, and scenic Nile views. The district attracts both international and domestic visitors, with the latter group constituting a growing proportion of total tourist arrivals in recent years(Subcounty et al., 2022). Understanding how social media influences Ugandan domestic tourists' choices to visit Jinja can inform more targeted and effective destination marketing strategies.

## **2.0 Problem Statement**

Despite the tremendous growth of social media usage in Uganda, where mobile internet penetration has reached over 50% and active social media users number in the millions, the deliberate leveraging of social media for promoting domestic tourism to destinations like Jinja remains underdeveloped and largely understudied(A. G. Kazaara et al., 2023). Tourism businesses and destination marketing organizations in the Jinja area have increasingly invested in social media presence, yet the causal pathways through which social media content influences domestic tourists' destination awareness, consideration, and final selection decisions remain unclear(Christopher & Felex, 2022). Furthermore, there is a dearth of empirical research specifically examining the social media–domestic tourism relationship in Uganda, making evidence-based policy and marketing decisions difficult(Paul & Kazaara, 2023). This study addresses this knowledge gap by empirically examining the influence of social media on domestic tourism choices with specific reference to Jinja District.

## **3.0 Main Objective**

The main objective of this study was to examine the influence of social media on domestic tourism destination choices among Ugandans, focusing on Jinja District. Specifically, the study sought to: (i) determine the influence of social media content on domestic tourist awareness of Jinja as a destination; (ii) assess the role of user-generated content in shaping tourists' destination selection decisions; and (iii) evaluate the effect of social media marketing by tourism businesses on tourist visitation decisions to Jinja District.

## **4.0 Literature Review**

### **4.1 Social Media and Tourism Decision-Making**

The influence of social media on tourism behavior has attracted substantial scholarly attention over the past decade. Xiang and Gretzel (2010) were among the early scholars to document the central role of social media in the travel planning process, demonstrating that travel-related content on social media platforms significantly shapes tourist information search behavior and destination image formation. Their framework distinguished between active users who generate travel content and passive users who consume others' content, both of which influence destination selection decisions through different mechanisms.

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Chung and Koo (2015) developed a model of social media influence on tourism destination image, proposing that social media content shapes cognitive, affective, and conative dimensions of destination image, with the conative dimension (behavioral intention to visit) being directly influenced by both the cognitive (knowledge) and affective (emotional appeal) components of destination image formed through social media exposure. Empirical tests of this model across multiple destination contexts have consistently confirmed its predictive validity, making it particularly relevant for understanding how Ugandans form impressions of Jinja as a domestic travel destination through social media.

#### **4.2 User-Generated Content and Destination Choice**

User-generated content (UGC), encompassing travel reviews, photos, videos, blog posts, and social media posts shared by tourists themselves, has been identified as one of the most influential forms of travel information. The authenticity, peer credibility, and experiential richness of UGC distinguish it from commercially produced tourism marketing materials and make it particularly persuasive in destination selection decisions (Ahn & Back, 2018). Fotis et al. (2012) found in a study of holiday planning behavior that social media reviews and personal recommendations from fellow travelers were rated as more trustworthy and influential than official tourism websites or travel brochures.

#### **4.3 Social Media Marketing in Tourism**

Tourism businesses and destination management organizations have increasingly adopted social media as a primary marketing channel, investing in content creation, influencer partnerships, paid advertising, and community management strategies. Kim et al. (2017) demonstrated that the quality of tourism business social media marketing, specifically its content creativity, posting frequency, audience engagement, and visual appeal, significantly influences follower purchase intentions and actual visitation decisions. In the African context, studies from Kenya, Tanzania, and South Africa have shown that social media marketing by tourism operators has been instrumental in boosting domestic tourism by making local destinations more visible and aspirationally attractive to urban residents.

#### **5.0 Methodology**

A cross-sectional survey research design was employed for this study, combining quantitative and qualitative methods to capture both measurable patterns and contextual nuances in the social media–domestic tourism relationship. The study population comprised: domestic tourists visiting Jinja's key attractions during the study period (estimated at 180 based on entry logs); tourism business owners and managers in Jinja (estimated at 45); and tourism promotion officers from Uganda Tourism Board and Jinja District (estimated at 15), giving a total population of 240 (Olanrewaju et al., 2021b). A sample of 160 was selected using stratified random sampling for tourists and purposive sampling for business owners and promotion officers.

Data were collected using structured questionnaires for tourists and semi-structured interview guides for business owners and promotion officers (Aslam et al., 2024). The questionnaire covered respondents' social media usage patterns, exposure to Jinja-related content, the role of UGC in their decision-making, and assessments of tourism

businesses' social media marketing. All constructs were measured on five-point Likert scales (Olanrewaju et al., 2021a). Reliability testing yielded Cronbach's Alpha coefficients of 0.83 to 0.89. Data analysis included descriptive statistics, Pearson's correlation, and multiple linear regression using SPSS Version 26(Nelson et al., 2022).

6.0 Results and Discussion

6.1 Descriptive Statistics

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics for Social Media and Domestic Tourism Variables (N=160)

| Variable                        | N   | Min  | Max  | Mean | Std. Dev. | Interpretation |
|---------------------------------|-----|------|------|------|-----------|----------------|
| Social Media Content Quality    | 160 | 1.40 | 5.00 | 3.89 | 0.741     | High           |
| User-Generated Content (UGC)    | 160 | 1.20 | 5.00 | 3.97 | 0.712     | High           |
| Social Media Marketing          | 160 | 1.40 | 5.00 | 3.74 | 0.813     | High           |
| Destination Awareness           | 160 | 1.60 | 5.00 | 4.01 | 0.691     | High           |
| Destination Choice              | 160 | 1.40 | 5.00 | 3.86 | 0.764     | High           |
| Tourism Visitation Intention    | 160 | 1.20 | 5.00 | 3.92 | 0.738     | High           |
| Peer Recommendations via SM     | 160 | 1.40 | 5.00 | 4.11 | 0.672     | High           |
| Content Authenticity Perception | 160 | 1.20 | 5.00 | 3.83 | 0.771     | High           |

Source: Primary Data, 2025

The descriptive results in Table 1 reveal consistently high mean scores across all variables, indicating that social media plays an important and well-recognized role in shaping domestic tourism behaviors and perceptions related to Jinja District. Peer recommendations via social media recorded the highest mean score (M=4.11, SD=0.672), with a notably small standard deviation indicating strong consensus among respondents that recommendations shared by friends, family, and fellow travelers through social media platforms significantly influence their decision to visit Jinja(Muhamad et al., 2023). This finding aligns with the broader tourism literature's emphasis on the power of peer influence in travel decision-making and confirms that word-of-mouth has migrated to digital channels as a primary information source.

Destination awareness also rated highly (M=4.01, SD=0.691), indicating that social media has been effective in making Ugandans aware of Jinja as a domestic tourism destination. User-generated content scored a high mean of 3.97 (SD=0.712), reflecting respondents' strong appreciation for authentic, peer-created content about Jinja's attractions. Tourism visitation intention (M=3.92, SD=0.738) was also high, suggesting that social media exposure creates strong positive intentions to visit, which is a crucial precursor to actual visitation behavior(Flavia et al., 2023). Social media content quality rated the highest mean among the predictor variables (M=3.89, SD=0.741), while social media marketing by tourism businesses received a slightly lower mean (M=3.74, SD=0.813), suggesting that while business-generated marketing content is appreciated, it is somewhat less influential than organic, peer-generated content in shaping destination choices. The relatively higher standard deviation for social media marketing (0.813)

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may reflect uneven quality in the social media marketing efforts of different tourism businesses in Jinja, with some achieving high impact and others failing to generate meaningful engagement.

## 6.2 Correlation Analysis

**Table 2: Pearson Correlation Matrix between Social Media and Domestic Tourism Choice**

| Variable               | SM Content | User-Gen Content | SM Marketing | Destination Choice |
|------------------------|------------|------------------|--------------|--------------------|
| SM Content Quality     | 1.000      |                  |              |                    |
| User-Generated Content | 0.671**    | 1.000            |              |                    |
| SM Marketing           | 0.589**    | 0.541**          | 1.000        |                    |
| Destination Choice     | 0.712**    | 0.684**          | 0.601**      | 1.000              |

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

### Source: Primary Data, 2025

The correlation analysis in Table 2 reveals that social media content quality has the strongest bivariate relationship with domestic tourism destination choice ( $r=0.712$ ,  $p<0.01$ ), confirming it as the most closely associated social media dimension with actual destination selection behavior. This strong positive correlation (0.712 is approaching the 0.80 threshold for 'strong' relationships) underscores the critical importance of content quality in social media's influence on tourism decision-making (A. G. Kazaara et al., 2023). When social media content about Jinja is visually appealing, informative, and authentic, it generates stronger positive responses in terms of destination consideration and selection. User-generated content was also strongly correlated with destination choice ( $r=0.684$ ,  $p<0.01$ ), reinforcing the literature's emphasis on UGC as a particularly credible and persuasive form of travel information. The high correlation between social media content quality and UGC ( $r=0.671$ ,  $p<0.01$ ) suggests that content quality is in part driven by the quality of user-generated posts, with organic authentic content contributing significantly to the overall quality of the social media information environment around Jinja as a destination (Shakilah & Kazaara, 2023). Social media marketing by tourism businesses demonstrated a significant positive correlation with destination choice ( $r=0.601$ ,  $p<0.01$ ), confirming that business-generated marketing content also plays a meaningful role in destination decision-making, though somewhat less powerfully than organic content.

## 6.3 Regression Analysis

**Table 3: Multiple Linear Regression on Social Media Predictors of Domestic Tourism Destination Choice**

| Predictor Variable           | B     | Std. Error | Beta ( $\beta$ ) | t-value | Sig.  | VIF   |
|------------------------------|-------|------------|------------------|---------|-------|-------|
| (Constant)                   | 0.512 | 0.198      |                  | 2.586   | 0.011 |       |
| Social Media Content Quality | 0.436 | 0.082      | 0.421            | 5.317   | 0.000 | 1.742 |
| User-Generated Content       | 0.352 | 0.088      | 0.338            | 4.000   | 0.000 | 1.681 |
| Social Media Marketing       | 0.301 | 0.096      | 0.249            | 3.135   | 0.002 | 1.614 |

**Model Summary:**  $R=0.796$ ,  $R^2=0.634$ ,  $Adjusted\ R^2=0.626$ ,  $F(3,156)=90.12$ ,  $p<0.001$ ;  $Durbin-Watson=1.98$

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**Source: Primary Data, 2025**

The regression results in Table 3 demonstrate that the three social media dimensions jointly explain 63.4% of the variance in domestic tourism destination choices ( $R^2=0.634$ ), with the overall model being highly significant ( $F(3,156)=90.12$ ,  $p<0.001$ ). This is among the highest levels of model explanatory power reported in the domestic tourism social media literature for Sub-Saharan African contexts, suggesting that social media is particularly influential in shaping Ugandan domestic tourists' destination choices, likely reflecting the high social media engagement rates among Ugandan urban populations and the visual appeal of Jinja's natural attractions as shareable content (Nelson et al., 2023).

Social media content quality was the strongest predictor of destination choice ( $\beta=0.421$ ,  $B=0.436$ ,  $t=5.317$ ,  $p<0.001$ ), indicating that for every unit increase in perceived social media content quality about Jinja, domestic tourism destination choice improves by 0.436 units. This finding has direct strategic implications: tourism stakeholders should invest in producing high-quality, visually compelling, and information-rich social media content about Jinja's attractions to maximize their impact on potential domestic visitors. User-generated content was the second strongest predictor ( $\beta=0.338$ ,  $B=0.352$ ,  $t=4.000$ ,  $p<0.001$ ), and social media marketing was also significant ( $\beta=0.249$ ,  $B=0.301$ ,  $t=3.135$ ,  $p=0.002$ ). VIF values ranging from 1.614 to 1.742 confirm that multicollinearity does not distort the regression estimates.

**7.0 Discussion of Results**

The study's findings provide robust empirical evidence that social media exerts a significant and substantial influence on domestic tourism destination choices among Ugandans visiting Jinja District. The model's high explanatory power ( $R^2=0.634$ ) compares favorably with similar studies from Kenya ( $R^2=0.58$ , Kamau & Njoroge, 2020), Tanzania ( $R^2=0.61$ , Mkwizu, 2019), and South Africa ( $R^2=0.66$ , Lebogang et al., 2021), confirming the influential role of social media in African domestic tourism decision-making across diverse national contexts.

The dominance of social media content quality ( $\beta=0.421$ ) as the strongest predictor underscores the importance of moving beyond mere social media presence to focus on content excellence. In the context of Jinja, this means producing professionally photographed images of the Nile, well-edited videos of adventure tourism activities, informative cultural heritage stories, and engaging food and lifestyle content that appeals to urban Ugandans' aspirational travel identities. The significant role of UGC ( $\beta=0.338$ ) further suggests that tourism businesses and destination marketing organizations should actively create conditions that encourage visitors to share their experiences on social media, for example through photography-friendly spaces, social media handles displayed at attractions, and incentive programs for social media sharing.

**8.0 Conclusions and Recommendations**

This study has established that social media significantly influences domestic tourism destination choices among Ugandans, with social media content quality, user-generated content, and social media marketing being the principal

drivers. Together, these dimensions explain approximately 63% of the variance in domestic tourists' destination selection decisions for Jinja District, confirming that social media is a primary information channel and persuasion mechanism in Uganda's domestic tourism ecosystem.

The following recommendations are advanced. Uganda Tourism Board should develop a coordinated national social media strategy for domestic tourism promotion that leverages high-quality visual content, influencer partnerships, and UGC amplification campaigns to enhance destination awareness across Uganda's major urban centers. Tourism businesses in Jinja should invest in professional social media management, including regular posting schedules, high-quality photography and videography, and active audience engagement, to maximize their marketing impact. The district local government and Uganda Tourism Board should jointly develop incentive programs that encourage Ugandans to share authentic travel experiences from Jinja, such as photography competitions, social media ambassador programs, and travel experience reward schemes. Internet and mobile data affordability should be advocated for as a broader policy priority, since expanded connectivity enables greater social media access and therefore amplifies the reach of social media tourism promotion efforts. Finally, future research should explore the specific social media platforms most influential for different demographic segments of Ugandan domestic tourists, and should examine the role of social media in shaping perceptions of tourism safety and value for money.

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