

Social Media Marketing Communication of Tourism Destinations before and during COVID-19: An Application of Media Richness Theory

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Abstract

Social media marketing communication (SMMC) has become key for tourism destinations, and even more so in times of COVID-19. For travelers and destination management organizations alike, the pandemic resembles a highly uncertain situation, which is also reflected in destinations' SMMC. The present study builds on media richness theory to explain how COVID-19 changes SMMC, specifically in terms of post length as well as use of emojis, hashtags and links. An empirical study using 1,550 Facebook posts of tourism destinations collected before and during the COVID-19 pandemic examines 1) if SMMC of tourism destinations changed as predicted by media richness theory and 2) how these changes played out regarding tourists' engagement with tourist destinations' social media posts. The study thus fosters a theoretical understanding of the contributions of media richness theory to SMMC and provides destination managers with guidelines how to design tourist destinations' SMMC in a tourism crisis.

Keywords: *Social media marketing communication; media richness theory; COVID-19 crisis*

Track: Tourism Marketing