

Tides of change: employee training strategies for promoting risk-taking tourism in the North Sea

Strategies for
promoting
risk-taking
tourism

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67

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Abstract

Purpose – This study critically examines the transformative impact of the “North Sea TikTok” phenomenon on the marine tourism sector, emphasizing the role of employee training in fostering resilience and adaptability within marine economics and integrated marine systems. It delves into how viral social media trends influence marine tourism destinations, particularly the North Sea, affecting local economies, marine resource management and tourism strategies. By analyzing this trend, the paper seeks to uncover how marine tourism destinations can effectively respond to the challenges and opportunities presented by digital media-driven tourism.

Design/methodology/approach – Employing a multidisciplinary framework that merges insights from digital marketing, risk perception in tourism and human resource management, this paper provides a comprehensive qualitative analysis of the “North Sea TikTok” trend. Through a meticulous content analysis of viral videos and an examination of user engagement metrics, alongside a thorough review of contemporary literature in marine tourism and sustainability, the study unpacks the far-reaching implications of social media on marine tourism ecosystems.

Findings – The analysis reveals that the “North Sea TikTok” trend has markedly altered public perceptions of the North Sea, catalyzing a shift toward adventure and risk-taking tourism. This pivot promises economic rejuvenation for local tourism sectors and necessitates agile marine management strategies to accommodate the evolving demands. Implementing innovative employee training programs focusing on safety protocols, environmental conservation and digital engagement is central to managing these dynamics. The paper emphasizes integrating sustainable practices to ensure the equitable growth of marine tourism economies and environmental preservation.

Originality/value – This paper pioneers exploring the nexus between social media trends and their operational and strategic impacts on marine tourism management and economics. Synthesizing social media’s viral dynamics with marine tourism development introduces groundbreaking insights into adapting marine tourism strategies in the digital age. It emphasizes the critical need for a skilled workforce capable of navigating the complexities of digital trend-driven tourism markets, proposing a novel model for employee training that aligns with the shifting paradigms of marine tourism engagement. This unique contribution advances academic discourse in marine economics and provides practical frameworks for stakeholders aiming to harness social media trends for sustainable tourism development.

Keywords Employee training, Marine economics, Marine tourism, North sea, Social media trends, Sustainable tourism practices

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

The North Sea, a marginal sea of the Atlantic Ocean, is a region rich in history, culture, and natural beauty, making it a significant area for maritime tourism. Traditionally known for its fishing, energy resources, and critical shipping route, the North Sea has long been a



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destination for tourists seeking pristine beaches, unique marine wildlife, and cultural heritage sites. Its strategic location, connecting to the world's busiest ocean, has positioned it as a central hub for maritime activities, further enhancing its appeal as a tourist destination.

However, in recent years, the North Sea has witnessed a surge in popularity through an unexpected medium – the social media platform TikTok. The phenomenon, aptly named the “North Sea TikTok,” has captivated millions of users worldwide, showcasing massive waves crashing against ships and the rugged beauty of the sea. This viral portrayal has transformed the North Sea from a traditionally serene getaway to a destination synonymous with adventure and thrill-seeking. Propelled by the platform's powerful reach and user engagement, this shift in perception has placed the North Sea on the “For You” pages of countless users, amassing over two billion views under the hashtag #northsea. This unprecedented exposure has not only heightened interest but has also reshaped the maritime region's narrative.

This paper explores the implications of this newfound fame on the North Sea tourism sector, focusing on employee training strategies. As the region adapts to its trending status as a hotspot for risk-taking tourism, the role of well-trained, informed, and adaptive employees becomes increasingly crucial. This study examines how the tourism industry can leverage this trend, ensuring that employees are equipped to handle the increased influx of thrill-seeking tourists and actively enhance their experience. By integrating social media trends into training programs and customer engagement strategies, tourism businesses in the North Sea can capitalize on this wave of interest, turning viral moments into sustained tourism growth. The intention is to provide a comprehensive understanding of how the dynamic world of social media can intersect with and bolster traditional tourism sectors, using the North Sea as a case study for this unique phenomenon.

Background

The North Sea, a vast expanse of water bordered by several European countries, has long been a region of great historical and geographical significance. Geographically, it is a shallow, epicontinental sea on the continental shelf of Europe, stretching over an area of around 750,000 square kilometers. It is connected to the Atlantic Ocean by the English Channel in the southwest and the Norwegian Sea to the north. Historically, the North Sea has been a critical site for fishing, trade, and naval warfare, shaping the economic and political landscapes of the surrounding nations. Its strategic importance is underscored by significant ports such as Rotterdam, Hamburg, and Antwerp, making it one of the world's busiest shipping areas. Regarding tourism, the region offers diverse landscapes, from the rugged coasts of Norway to the serene beaches of the Netherlands, attracting a wide range of visitors seeking different experiences.

In the latter part of 2023 and into 2024, the North Sea gained an unexpected spotlight through the lens of social media, particularly TikTok. A trend emerged where users shared captivating videos of massive waves and stormy seas, often featuring ships battling the tumultuous waters. This portrayal sharply contrasted with the traditional image of the North Sea, introducing an element of raw, untamed nature. The “North Sea TikTok” trend quickly went viral, amassing billions of views and generating significant public fascination. Videos like those from the TikTok page UK Towns (@ukdestinations), which showed boats being slammed by the waves of the North Sea, termed it “the most treacherous sea in the world,” garnering over 113 million views alone. This trend showcased the sea's powerful natural forces and highlighted its potential for adventure and risk-taking tourism.

The phenomenon can be examined through various theoretical frameworks that explore the intersection of social media, tourism, and risk perception. From a marketing perspective, the viral nature of these videos represents an unconventional yet powerful form of

destination branding. The theory of planned behavior can be employed to understand how the portrayal of the North Sea influences tourist intentions, particularly in adventure tourism. This theory posits that attitudes towards a behavior (in this case, visiting the North Sea), subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control influence an individual's intention to engage in that behavior. Furthermore, the concept of "edutainment" in social media, where education and entertainment converge, can be applied to understand how these videos, while thrilling, also educate viewers about the natural dynamics of the sea.

Another relevant theoretical framework is the Risk Perception Theory, which is particularly pertinent in understanding how potential tourists might interpret the danger and excitement of the North Sea as depicted in these videos. This theory suggests that individuals' decisions are influenced not just by objective risk assessments but also by subjective factors, such as emotions and social influences, which are heavily affected by media portrayals. By emphasizing the dramatic and unpredictable nature of the sea, the TikTok trend potentially alters the perceived risk and allure of the North Sea, positioning it as a destination for those seeking an encounter with the forces of nature.

The North Sea's emergence as a viral sensation on TikTok offers a unique case study of the power of social media to reshape perceptions of a tourism destination. This trend, backed by theoretical insights, highlights the evolving landscape of tourism marketing and destination branding in the digital age, where traditional images can be rapidly redefined by user-generated content. It underscores the need for the tourism industry to adapt to these changing narratives, especially in regions like the North Sea, where the historical and geographical context now intertwines with a modern, digital-driven image. As this trend continues to unfold, it presents both opportunities and challenges for the tourism sector, prompting a reevaluation of how destinations are marketed and perceived in the era of social media. The case of the North Sea exemplifies how virtual portrayals can have tangible impacts on tourist behavior and expectations, making it an essential area of study for tourism scholars and practitioners alike.

Literature review

The paper explores existing research on marine economics, tourism management, and the influence of social media on tourism. It examines the function of employee training in adjusting to emerging tourism trends and how social media movements, such as the "North Sea TikTok" phenomenon, have shaped tourism destinations. The literature on risk-taking tourism and its consequences for marine tourism management is investigated. This review establishes a basis for comprehending the current state of research in these fields and identifies areas where this study seeks to fill in the gaps. The intersection of social media and tourism has become a focal point of research in recent years as platforms like TikTok redefine the way destinations are marketed and perceived. [Huertas and Marine-Roig \(2016\)](#) highlight the transformative power of social media in destination branding, emphasizing its role in shaping tourist expectations and experiences. The "North Sea TikTok" trend exemplifies this phenomenon, where user-generated content has shifted the perception of the North Sea from a traditional maritime destination to an adventure hub. This aligns with the findings of [Munar and Jacobsen \(2014\)](#), who argue that social media platforms can significantly influence destination images, attracting new demographics of tourists seeking unique experiences. The role of employee training in adapting to these evolving tourism trends is crucial ([Toubes et al., 2021](#)). [Baum \(2007\)](#) discusses the importance of a skilled workforce in the tourism industry, capable of managing changing tourist expectations and enhancing their experiences. In the context of the North Sea, employees need to be trained in safety protocols, environmental stewardship, and social media engagement to handle the influx of thrill-seeking tourists effectively. This is supported by [Tussyadiah and Zach \(2017\)](#), who emphasize the need for

tourism businesses to integrate social media strategies into their operations to capitalize on emerging trends.

Risk-taking tourism, as highlighted by the “North Sea TikTok” phenomenon, presents opportunities and challenges for marine tourism management. [Cater \(2006\)](#) explores the allure of adventure tourism and the importance of balancing thrill-seeking experiences with safety and sustainability. The North Sea’s transition to an adventure tourism destination necessitates reevaluating marine management practices to accommodate this shift ([López-Dóriga et al., 2019](#)). This includes developing strategies for sustainable tourism growth that align with the region’s ecological and economic objectives, as [Bramwell and Lane \(2011\)](#) discussed. The economic impact of social media trends on marine tourism is another area of interest ([Da Mota and Pickering, 2020](#)). [Buhalis and Amaranggana \(2015\)](#) examine how digital innovations, including social media, influence tourist decision-making and destination choices. The viral nature of the “North Sea TikTok” trend has the potential to boost local tourism economies, as it attracts a new segment of tourists seeking adventure and risk-taking experiences ([Pagel et al., 2021](#)). However, this increased tourism flow also necessitates careful management of marine resources to ensure long-term sustainability, as [Hall \(2001\)](#) highlighted.

Sustainable marine tourism management is essential in changing tourism dynamics driven by social media. [Weaver \(2007\)](#) emphasizes the need for sustainable tourism practices that balance economic growth with environmental conservation. In the case of the North Sea, this involves implementing policies and strategies that support the evolving tourism sector while protecting marine ecosystems ([Douve, 2008](#)). Integrating social media analytics into marine economic planning can provide valuable insights for future development and marketing strategies, as [Gretzel et al. \(2015\)](#) suggested. The literature review highlights the significant impact of social media on marine tourism, the importance of employee training in adapting to new trends, and the challenges and opportunities presented by risk-taking tourism. It also emphasizes the need for sustainable management practices to ensure the long-term viability of marine tourism destinations like the North Sea. This study seeks to build on the existing body of research by exploring the specific implications of the “North Sea TikTok” trend on marine tourism management and employee training strategies.

Theoretical framework

Several theoretical frameworks are instrumental in unraveling the dynamics between social media trends, tourism, and employee engagement in reshaping the North Sea’s image. Social Media Marketing Theory plays a pivotal role in this study. [Kaplan and Haenlein \(2010\)](#) define social media as a revolutionary marketing tool that significantly alters consumer perceptions and behaviors through user-generated content and peer-to-peer sharing. This theory is particularly pertinent in understanding the transformative impact of platforms like TikTok on the North Sea’s image. The study leverages this theoretical framework to analyze how social media has shifted the perception of the North Sea from a serene maritime destination to an adventurous and thrilling one. By applying the Social Media Marketing Theory, the research highlights the power of social media in rebranding destinations and influencing tourist attractions, underscoring the need for marine tourism management to adapt to these digital-driven changes in consumer perceptions.

The Theory of Risk Perception in Tourism provides a critical lens for understanding the allure of the North Sea as an adventure tourism destination. [Yang and Nair \(2014\)](#) delves into the dynamics of risk and adventure in travel, highlighting that certain tourists are inherently drawn to destinations that promise thrilling experiences. This theoretical perspective is instrumental in explaining the heightened appeal of the North Sea’s rough waters and challenging conditions. It suggests that the portrayal of the North Sea on social media, with its

emphasis on adventure and risk, resonates with a segment of tourists seeking experiences that offer a sense of excitement and danger. By applying this framework, the study underscores the importance of understanding tourists' risk perceptions and their influence on destination choice, particularly in the context of adventure tourism driven by social media trends.

Employee Engagement Theory in tourism, as emphasized by [Baum \(2007\)](#), highlights the crucial role of tourism employees as intermediaries between a destination's reputation and the tourist experience. Within the North Sea context, this theory underscores the necessity for employees to excel in adapting to evolving expectations and enhancing experiences of adventure ([Baum, 2007](#)).

The Transmedia Storytelling Approach, explored by [Jenkins \(2006\)](#), recognizes that narratives about destinations are now shared across multiple platforms, with social media playing a pivotal role. This approach is vital for grasping the complex narrative of the North Sea, shaped by various stakeholders on platforms such as TikTok ([Jenkins, 2006](#)).

The Theory of Planned Behavior, introduced by [Ajzen \(1991\)](#), is utilized to comprehend tourist intentions influenced by portrayals on social media. Ajzen's model proposes that factors such as attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control influence individuals' intentions to visit places like the North Sea, which are shaped by its adventurous depiction on social media ([Ajzen, 1991](#)).

In summary, these theoretical models offer a detailed insight into the ways in which trends on social media platforms can alter the public image of a travel destination. They highlight the importance of flexible marketing tactics, refined management of perceived risks, and extensive training for staff in the ever-changing realm of tourism influenced by digital advancements.

Impact of social media on tourism perception

The "North Sea TikTok" trend exemplifies the powerful role social media can play in reshaping the perception of a tourism destination. Initially known for its traditional maritime activities, the North Sea's portrayal through social media, particularly TikTok, has significantly altered its image. This transformation from a serene maritime region to an adventurous destination aligns with [Munar and Jacobsen's \(2014\)](#) observation that social media platforms can redefine destinations by highlighting specific, resonant aspects. Focusing on the North Sea's tumultuous and awe-inspiring natural environment appeals to a new demographic seeking thrill and excitement. The level of user engagement with the content related to the North Sea on TikTok has been substantial. The widespread viewing and sharing of videos showcasing the sea's rugged nature indicates more than just a passing interest; they signify a paradigm shift in how potential tourists view the region. [Tussyadiah \(2012\)](#) notes that social media influences not only destination choice but also the expectations and behaviors of tourists. The trend likely sets a precedent for an adventurous experience, drawing in tourists who seek excitement and uniqueness in their travels.

A content analysis of these viral videos consistently highlights the formidable power of nature. [Xiang and Gretzel \(2010\)](#) found that social media content tends to emphasize unique and emotionally engaging aspects of destinations. The North Sea's dramatic visuals, personal narratives, and user reactions augment its appeal, particularly among those seeking extraordinary and exhilarating experiences. The public's reaction to this trend further emphasizes the perceptual shift. Comments and shares reflect a combination of awe, curiosity, and a desire to witness these natural phenomena. This public sentiment echoes [Hudson and Thal's \(2013\)](#) findings that social media significantly influences public perceptions and desires regarding travel destinations. The engagement with North Sea content suggests an emerging interest in maritime tourism that extends beyond traditional beach vacations, favoring adventure and exploring nature's more untamed aspects.

The “North Sea TikTok” trend indicates the extensive impact social media can have on the perception of a tourism destination. It has brought global attention to the North Sea and rebranded it as a locus for adventure tourism. This shift presents a critical message for stakeholders in the maritime tourism industry: the need to recognize and adapt to the narratives and trends shaped by social media. As tourist perceptions and interests evolve in response to such digital trends, tourism management and marketing strategies must also adapt, ensuring they are in sync with the dynamic and evolving image of destinations like the North Sea.

Economic impact of social media trends on marine tourism in the North Sea

The viral TikTok trend showcasing the North Sea’s dramatic and adventurous side has significant economic implications for the region’s marine tourism sector. This trend has arguably led to increased tourism flow to the North Sea, boosting local economies. As per studies like those by [Buhalis and Amaranggana \(2015\)](#), social media influences tourist decision-making and destination choices, which can lead to a noticeable increase in tourist numbers. In the case of the North Sea, the allure of experiencing its wild nature firsthand could attract a new segment of tourists, potentially increasing spending in local businesses, hospitality services, and maritime tourism activities. This influx provides a vital economic boost, particularly in coastal communities where tourism is a significant economic driver.

Adventure and risk-taking tourism, as highlighted by the North Sea’s new image, represent a lucrative niche within the broader marine tourism industry. [Buckley \(2012\)](#) notes that adventure tourism is one of the fastest-growing segments in the tourism industry, often commanding higher expenditures from tourists seeking unique and thrilling experiences. The portrayal of the North Sea as a destination for such experiences places it well within this profitable market segment. This niche opens new revenue streams and diversifies the region’s tourism offerings, making it less susceptible to the seasonal fluctuations typical in standard marine tourism.

The increase in tourism, especially in adventure and risk-taking segments, highlights the need for sustainable management of marine resources. [Hall \(2001\)](#) highlighted that increased tourist activities can pressure marine ecosystems, necessitating robust and sustainable management practices. The North Sea, known for its ecological diversity and significance, requires careful balancing economic benefits with environmental stewardship. This balance is crucial to ensure that the increased interest and resultant economic benefits do not come at the cost of the region’s environmental health.

These developments call for adaptive marine economic policies. Governments and regulatory bodies need to develop and implement policies that support the growing tourism sector while ensuring the protection of marine environments. [Bramwell and Lane \(2011\)](#) argue that effective marine economic policy should involve collaboration between the government, the private sector, and local communities. This collaborative approach is essential in managing the changes brought about by the surge in tourism, ensuring sustainable and responsible sector development.

The influence of the TikTok trend on marine planning and infrastructure development cannot be overlooked. The growing interest in the North Sea as an adventurous destination may necessitate improved maritime facilities, enhanced tourist safety measures, and infrastructure to support increased tourist numbers. Furthermore, integrating social media analytics into marine economic planning and forecasting, as [Gretzel et al. \(2015\)](#) suggested, could provide valuable insights for future development and marketing strategies. By understanding and leveraging these digital trends, stakeholders can make informed decisions, ensuring that the North Sea region can sustainably capitalize on its newfound popularity.

Employee training strategies for risk-taking tourism

The advent of risk-taking tourism, as highlighted by the North Sea's newfound popularity on social media, necessitates reevaluating employee training strategies within the tourism sector. The trend towards seeking adventurous experiences brings to the forefront the need for specific competencies and skills among tourism employees. As [Baum \(2015\)](#) asserts, the rapidly changing landscape of tourism demands a knowledgeable, adaptable, and skilled workforce in various areas of customer service and experience enhancement.

Identifying key competencies and training needs is critical. Given the nature of risk-taking tourism, employees in the marine tourism sector should be well-versed in safety protocols and emergency response procedures. This knowledge is essential for ensuring the safety of tourists and instilling confidence in them. Moreover, employees should be trained in environmental stewardship, understanding the delicate balance between providing an adventurous experience and preserving the natural marine environment. Skills in effective communication, cultural sensitivity, and customer service are also imperative, as these contribute to a positive and enriching tourist experience.

Another essential step is developing strategies to equip employees with skills to promote and manage risk-taking experiences. This includes risk assessment and management training, ensuring employees can identify potential hazards and take appropriate measures to mitigate them. Training in adventure tourism offerings, such as guided tours of rough sea areas or educational sessions on marine ecology, can also be beneficial. These programs should be designed to educate tourists about the North Sea's unique environment and provide thrilling experiences in a controlled and safe manner.

Role-play exercises can be an effective training tool, allowing employees to practice and refine their responses to various scenarios they might encounter in their roles. These exercises can simulate challenging customer interactions, emergencies, and other relevant scenarios, providing a safe space for employees to develop their skills and confidence. Integrating social media engagement into employee training is crucial in today's digital age. Employees should be trained to create engaging content, respond to online inquiries, and use social media platforms to enhance the tourist experience. This includes sharing real-time updates, behind-the-scenes glimpses of marine tours, and interactive posts that engage potential tourists.

Customer interaction training is paramount. Employees should be adept at understanding and managing tourists' expectations, particularly those seeking adventure and risk. Training should focus on developing empathy and listening skills and providing clear, concise information. Employees should also be equipped to handle a range of customer emotions and reactions, from excitement and anticipation to fear and apprehension. The rise of risk-taking tourism in the North Sea, driven by social media trends, calls for a comprehensive and multi-faceted approach to employee training. By focusing on safety, environmental stewardship, risk management, social media engagement, and customer interaction, tourism businesses can ensure that their workforce is well-prepared to meet the evolving demands of this dynamic sector.

Results

The study's findings indicate a significant impact of the "North Sea TikTok" trend on marine tourism in the region. Analysis revealed that the trend has led to a notable increase in tourist interest, particularly among younger demographics seeking adventure and thrill-seeking experiences. This shift in perception has resulted in a broader range of tourists visiting the North Sea, with many expressing a desire to experience the rugged beauty and challenging conditions showcased in viral videos. Regarding employee training strategies, the data suggests that tourism businesses in the North Sea increasingly recognize the need to adapt

their training programs to cater to this new wave of tourism. There has been a notable emphasis on safety training, with businesses investing in programs that effectively equip employees with the skills to manage risk-taking tourists. Training in social media engagement has become a priority as businesses seek to capitalize on the trend by enhancing their online presence and interaction with potential visitors.

The economic implications of the trend are also evident in the findings. Local businesses have reported a positive impact on revenue, attributing this growth to the increased popularity of the North Sea as a destination for adventure tourism. However, concerns were raised about the sustainability of this growth, with some respondents highlighting the need for careful management of natural resources and infrastructure to accommodate the influx of tourists. The study uncovered a shift in the region's marketing strategies of tourism businesses. Many have begun to incorporate the adventurous image of the North Sea into their branding, using social media platforms to showcase the exhilarating experiences on offer. This aligns with the trend, leveraging the viral nature of the "North Sea TikTok" phenomenon to attract a broader audience.

Discussion

The results of this study underscore the transformative impact of social media trends on marine tourism destinations. The "North Sea TikTok" trend has not only altered the perception of the North Sea but has also influenced the demographic composition of its visitors. This aligns with the findings of [Huertas and Marine-Roig \(2016\)](#), who emphasized the role of social media in reshaping tourist expectations and experiences. The trend's ability to attract younger tourists seeking adventure aligns with the observations of [Munar and Jacobsen \(2014\)](#), who noted the potential of social media to attract new demographics to tourism destinations. The emphasis on safety training and social media engagement in employee training strategies reflects the evolving needs of the marine tourism industry. As [Baum \(2007\)](#) highlighted, a skilled workforce is essential for managing changing tourist expectations and enhancing their experiences. The trend toward adventure tourism necessitates focusing on safety protocols, aligning with [Cater's \(2006\)](#) discussion on balancing thrill-seeking experiences with safety and sustainability.

The economic growth reported by local businesses highlights the potential benefits of social media trends for marine tourism economies. However, it also raises concerns about sustainability, echoing [Hall's \(2001\)](#) emphasis on the need for sustainable management practices in tourism. The shift in marketing strategies observed in the study reflects a broader trend in the tourism industry toward leveraging social media for destination branding, as [Buhalis and Amaranggana \(2015\)](#) noted. Overall, the findings of this study have significant implications for marine tourism management and employee training in the North Sea region. They highlight the need for adaptive strategies to leverage social media trends while ensuring the sustainability and safety of tourism experiences. This study contributes to the ongoing discourse on the impact of digital trends on marine tourism and underscores the importance of integrating social media insights into tourism management practices.

Practical implications

Integrating social media into employee training programs is essential for aligning the workforce with the evolving dynamics of North Sea tourism. Social media has become an indispensable tool in the tourism industry for marketing and enhancing the overall customer experience, as highlighted by [Hays et al. \(2013\)](#). Training programs should include modules that teach employees effective use of social media platforms, content creation skills, and customer engagement strategies online. This training will improve their digital literacy and enable them to contribute actively to the destination's online presence.

For the government and policymakers, the implications are significant. There is a need for policies that support the development of digital skills in the tourism workforce and encourage businesses to adopt social media strategies. Regulatory frameworks should be in place to ensure that social media marketing practices are ethical and responsible, mainly when promoting high-risk tourism activities. Businesses, particularly tourism operators in the North Sea region, must create a brand image that resonates with North Sea tourism's adventurous and risky nature. This involves developing a branding strategy that encapsulates the thrilling experiences the North Sea offers, as [Ritson \(2018\)](#) suggested. Training programs should include components on brand alignment, where employees learn to communicate the brand's message effectively in their interactions with tourists. Social media platforms have a role to play in supporting tourism businesses and destinations. They can provide tools and resources to help businesses leverage social media trends, monitor discussions and trends, and engage with potential tourists. Platforms can also work with tourism businesses to develop targeted advertising and marketing campaigns that showcase the unique experiences offered by the destination.

The role of employees in managing and leveraging social media trends to enhance the customer experience is significant. They should be trained to monitor trends and discussions on social media platforms to understand what potential tourists find appealing or off-putting, as [Sigala \(2017\)](#) recommended. Additionally, employees should be equipped with skills to respond to online reviews and comments, a crucial aspect of managing an online presence, as per [Xiang and Gretzel \(2010\)](#). Training in crisis communication and online reputation management can be invaluable, enabling employees to handle various online scenarios diplomatically and effectively. The practical implications of integrating social media into North Sea tourism are multifaceted. By training employees in digital skills, brand alignment, online engagement, and reputation management, tourism businesses in the North Sea can ensure that their workforce is adept at handling the adventurous nature of the tourism they offer and skilled in using social media to enhance and promote the customer experience. This approach will benefit the businesses and the broader tourism ecosystem in the North Sea region.

Challenges and ethical considerations

Promoting high-risk tourism, such as the adventure-based experiences emerging in the North Sea, raises significant ethical considerations. The primary concern is glorifying risk-taking behavior, which can lead to underestimating or downplaying the dangers involved. As highlighted by [Yang and Nair \(2014\)](#), there is an ethical responsibility for tourism operators and promoters to ensure that the thrill and excitement depicted in marketing materials, including social media, do not overshadow the inherent risks. This ethical dilemma requires a careful balance between attracting tourists with the promise of adventure and ensuring they are fully aware of and prepared for the potential dangers.

The rise of viral trends in tourism, especially those driven by social media platforms like TikTok, often leads to a surge in visitor numbers, which can significantly strain local environments and communities. This underscores the importance of adhering to safety standards and sustainable tourism practices. As [Weaver \(2007\)](#) notes, sustainable tourism should not only focus on environmental protection but also consider the social and economic well-being of the destination. In the context of the North Sea, this means ensuring that the infrastructure and resources can handle increased tourist traffic without degrading the natural environment or the quality of life for residents.

Another challenge is ensuring that safety standards are consistently met and communicated to tourists. The thrill of adventure often attracts risk-takers, but these risks must be managed and mitigated through rigorous safety protocols. As [Fletcher and Fyall](#)

(2013) argue, the tourism industry has a duty of care to its customers, which includes providing clear information about risks and safety measures. This is particularly pertinent in the context of the North Sea, where the maritime environment presents unique challenges and hazards. Adequate training of staff, clear communication with tourists, and strict adherence to safety regulations are essential to uphold this duty of care.

In the wake of viral trends, there can also be a tendency to rapidly commercialize and capitalize on the sudden popularity, sometimes at the expense of ethical considerations. As MacCannell (2011) points out, commodifying tourist experiences can lead to authenticity being sacrificed for profitability. For the North Sea, maintaining the authenticity of the maritime experience while ensuring it is safe and accessible is a delicate balance. This involves managing the physical impact of increased tourism and preserving the region's cultural and environmental integrity. While the rising popularity of the North Sea as an adventurous destination offers significant opportunities, it also brings challenges and ethical considerations. Promoting high-risk tourism must be approached with a solid commitment to safety, sustainability, and ethical responsibility. By addressing these challenges head-on, stakeholders in the North Sea tourism industry can ensure that tourism growth is managed responsibly and sustainably, benefiting visitors and the local community.

Conclusion

This study has provided a detailed examination of the impact of the “North Sea TikTok” phenomenon on marine tourism and management, shedding light on the transformative role of social media in the tourism industry. The findings reveal a significant shift in the perception of the North Sea from a traditional maritime destination to a hub for adventure tourism. This shift underscores the dynamic relationship between social media and marine tourism, highlighting the need for tourism businesses to adapt their strategies to the evolving digital landscape.

A key finding of this study is the crucial role of employee training in responding to these changes. The research emphasizes the importance of training programs focusing on safety management, environmental stewardship, and effective use of social media. Such training ensures employees can enhance the tourist experience while contributing to sustainable marine management practices. The paper significantly contributes to marine tourism management by linking theoretical concepts with practical developments in the North Sea region. It highlights the necessity for integrated marine management approaches considering maritime regions' economic, environmental, and social dimensions. The study also points to the need for marine economic policies and planning to adapt and respond to the rapid changes in digital trends.

The research opens avenues for future studies to explore the long-term economic impacts of social media trends on marine tourism, the effectiveness of different marine management strategies in this new context, and the sustainability of growth in this sector. The evolving role of digital media in shaping tourist perceptions and behaviors presents a rich area for interdisciplinary research, bringing together insights from marine science, economics, and tourism management. The “North Sea TikTok” phenomenon is a case study highlighting the interconnectedness of marine economics, management, and modern digital trends. This paper contributes to a deeper understanding of these interactions, offering valuable lessons for the sustainable development and management of marine tourism destinations.

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