

ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING IN PROMOTING CULTURAL TOURISM IN PUNJAB: A BIBLIOMETRIC ANALYSIS

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ABSTRACT

The role performed by culture in shaping regional development is being increasingly acknowledged, and it is for this reason that Punjab enjoys a pivotal status, in terms of its rich history, colourful festivals, and enduring traditions, both among domestic and international tourists. The explosive growth of social media has changed how we market cultural experiences, allowing destinations to reach international audiences for far less resources than traditional means. In this context, the current study takes a bibliometric analysis of the literature from 2010 to 2023 on social media marketing for cultural tourism promotion, with a reference to Punjab as a case model. The analysis charts trends, growth of output, top journals and authors' influence, co-author relationships and thematic clusters. The results indicate a significant increase in interest from scholars after 2018, with the major themes being digital storytelling, e-WoM, influencer co-creations, and destination branding. Second, the study highlights that research specifically focused on Punjab is relatively underrepresented and suggests a future research agenda which foregrounds embedding social media analytics, AI-driven engagement strategies and culturally based civic storytelling to sustain community participation and cultural tourism development.

Keywords: Social media marketing, cultural tourism, Punjab, bibliometric analysis, destination branding

1. INTRODUCTION

Tourism is increasingly perceived as an essential tool in the global drive for economic development, cultural preservation and community growth (Kemp, 2023). In addition to generating GDP, tourism is crucial in protecting and promoting ICH through increasing awareness, appreciation and the sustainable use of local traditions (Richards, 2018). In the Indian perspective, Punjab is one of the most prominent cultural tourism destinations known for its vivid festivals like Baisakhi, lively folk dances such as Bhangra and Gidda, authentic food options and heritage sites like the Golden Temple (Amritsar) and the Wagah Border Ceremony (Sharma, 2023). These cultural treasures are visited by millions of tourists, both domestic and international, each year, making Punjab one of the wealthiest states in terms of culture as well as spirituality (Punjab Adventure Tourism Policy, 2023).

But in this age of a competitive and global tourism market, traditional modes of marketing through print ads, brochures, and television campaigns are not enough to target the current international traveller who heavily depends on digital media for information gathering (Kotler et al., 2021). This role reversal from traditional persuasive communication and the potential for interactive dialogue that consumers increasingly expect are provoked by the increasing prevalence of Web 2.0 technologies and user-generated content, which have

changed the playing field of destination marketing, allowing tourists to become active creators through online interaction (Xiang & Gretzel, 2010). Social media such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter (X), and YouTube have become powerful instruments for spreading cultural stories, increasing brand recognition and enabling real-time interactions of the destinations with the prospective tourist users (Tafesse & Wien, 2018).

Specifically in the case of cultural tourism, social media marketing plays an important role in effectively blending storytelling with visual communication and experience sharing to engage different segments of audiences (Hays et al., 2012). For places such as Punjab, social media highlights not just historic sites but also local rituals, festivals, crafts and food experiences which might be otherwise underrepresented in conventional destination marketing campaigns (Gartner, 2020). Also, the participatory characteristic of social media allows electronic mouth (e-WoM), demonstrated to significantly influence tourist attitudes, trust and intention to visit cultural destinations. (Litvin et al., 2008; Jalilvand & Heidari, 2017).

Although the significance of social media in tourism marketing has been increasingly acknowledged worldwide, there is less awareness about the relationship between social media marketing and cultural tourism in Punjab from an academic perspective. Current literature concentrating more widely on the Indian tourism industry does not consider region-specific contexts (Dhewi et al., 2023). Consequently, there is no systematic evidence on how this academic research has developed over time without identifying what intellectual structures are predominant in the field and which emerging areas might provide future potential for further research.

As a quantitative review approach, bibliometric analysis provides a strong tool to fill this gap by mapping the scholarly outputs of researchers, tracking the patterns of citation influence among authors, and recognizing what is hot in research (Donthu et al., 2021). It allows researchers to move beyond narrative reviews and construct a knowledge structure of the field based on evidence. Prior bibliometric studies in tourism have effectively shown trends in, for example, sustainable tourism (Liu et al., 2020), smart tourism (Gretzel et al., 2015) and destination image research (Stepchenkova & Li, 2012), but rarely specifically focused on the temporal evolution of social media marketing's role to promote cultural tourism.

Thus, this paper seeks to address that void by conducting a systematic bibliometric review of scholarly publications on social media marketing and cultural tourism from 2010 to 2023. With a focus on implications for promoting Punjab as a cultural tourism destination, by analyzing publication trends, citation networks, co-authorship patterns and keyword co-occurrence, this paper attempts to map an intellectual landscape of the field.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

It is an established fact that Social Media Marketing (SMM) has significant effects on D-DIM, changing the behaviour of tourists and increasing tourist engagement (Mongeon & Hus, 2016; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Through social media channels like Instagram, Facebook or YouTube, the use of immersive visual storytelling, live streaming and interactive content allows destinations to present cultural landmarks, festivals and local experiences in a way that leads to influencing image perceptions and behavioural intention among prospective tourists (Tafesse & Wien, 2018; Leung et al., 2013). Visual storytelling and interactive multimedia

work especially well for cultural tourism as they transmit the material and non-material dimensions of heritage, including architectural beauty, local folklore and culinary traditions (Xiang & Gretzel, 2010).

One of the mechanisms by which social media affects tourism is e-WoM. User-generated content, reviews, ratings and travel blogs expand the exposure of promotional campaigns and encourage trust and credibility with potential travellers (Litvin et al., 2008; Jalilvand & Heidari, 2017). Influencer marketing has also become a strategic approach in cultural tourism, because influencers with large social media followings are powerful intermediaries who can express the value of heritage experiences to their audiences and attract niche traveller segments (Boerman et al., 2017). Recent research has also drawn attention to the role of interaction in the co-creation of cultural experiences. Tourists not only are consumers, but they also contribute through posts, stories, and exchanged experiences, thus increasing their destination loyalty and cultural awareness (Buhalis & Sinarta, 2020).

In the case of Punjab, there is now a growing realization among public and private players about the possibilities of promoting heritage, festivals and culinary traditions through social media. The various online visuals, Instagram campaign for Baisakhi, virtual tours of Golden Temple and Facebook promotion to add travelling into rural tourism are being made use of by the Punjab Tourism Board in collaboration with hotels, local Artisans and event managers (Khaki & Khan, 2023). However, prospective research in the Pakistani context of cultural tourism in Punjab has seemingly lacked sufficient academic canon to date and seems to be fragmented, as most studies are focused on the provider segment or regional bibliography (Li, 2020). There is limited mapping of the development of research in the field, both nationally and internationally, of what intellectual structures prevail, or how new areas emerge.

Bibliometric analysis fills in this lack by quantitatively drawing the scholarly landscape so that we can discover the core of research, leading authors and emerging topics (Donthu et al., 2021; Aria & Cuccurullo, 2017). Early inspirations in other realms point to potential clusters pertinent to cultural tourism, such as “digital branding of heritage”, which deals with how SMM improves perceived value and image of cultural destinations (Gartner et al., 2020). Community-based tourism through social media, which emphasizes participatory engagement and local stakeholders’ empowerment (Buhalis & Sinarta, 2019) and “AI and predictive analytics in cultural promotion”, focusing on the use of algorithms for customising marketing requests, predicting tourists' preferences (Pisolkar et al., 2020).

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Data Sources and Search Strategy

Information was mainly gathered from Scopus and Web of Science (WoS), two leading bibliographic databases used to index peer-reviewed articles, conference papers, and international journals in the field of social sciences and tourism (Falagas et al., 2007; Mongeon & Paul-Hus, 2016). The study period ranged from 2010 to 2023, covering more than a decade of scientific contributions in which social media was established as an indispensable marketing tool for cultural destinations (Napolitano et al., 2022).

A series of keywords and Boolean operators has been implemented to guarantee the precision and relevance of recovered documents. The search string was: “social media marketing” AND “cultural tourism” AND (“Punjab” OR “India”). This process allowed for a mix of global research studies and those bounded within Punjab or India, balancing the international with the local (Punjab Adventure Tourism Policy, 2023).

3.2 Screening and Selection Criteria

The first search resulted in 245 documents. Standard criteria for inclusion and exclusion were implemented after applying bibliometric filters. We only kept the English publications, peer-reviewed journal papers and conference papers to generate an integrated document collection of 180 papers in total. This follows bibliometric standards, used to guarantee the quality and comparability of the data across different sources (Donthu et al., 2021). Book chapters, editorials and non-peer-reviewed reports were excluded to protect methodological quality.

3.3 Data Analysis Tools and Techniques

The dataset was processed with VOS viewer and Microsoft Excel. VOS viewer has gained popularity in bibliometric mapping for its flexibility to form the co-authorship networks, transcribe keyword co-occurrence maps and carry out citation analysis (van Eck & Waltman, 2010; Aria & Cuccurullo, 2017). Through this tool, research clusters such as “digital branding of heritage”, “community-based tourism through social media” and “AI in cultural tourism promotion” can be identified, which enable insights for thematic focuses within the discipline.

The trends of annual publication growth, contributions from countries and the distribution of articles in academic journals were analyzed by Microsoft Excel. Descriptive statistics are also used in Excel, which supplements network visualization to provide a better perception of publication trends and the latest research front. (Donthu et al., 2021; Li, 2020).

In general, the method enables systematic and transparent replicability, indicating how bibliometric methods can advance the investigation of social media marketing and knowledge landscapes in cultural tourism. Through the integration of network visualization and trend analysis, this research work serves as a valuable aid in quantitative and qualitative terms to the investigation of the developments and influence of authors, theme-based clusters for advanced practice guideline implementation in connection with Punjab’s cultural tourism.

4. RESULTS

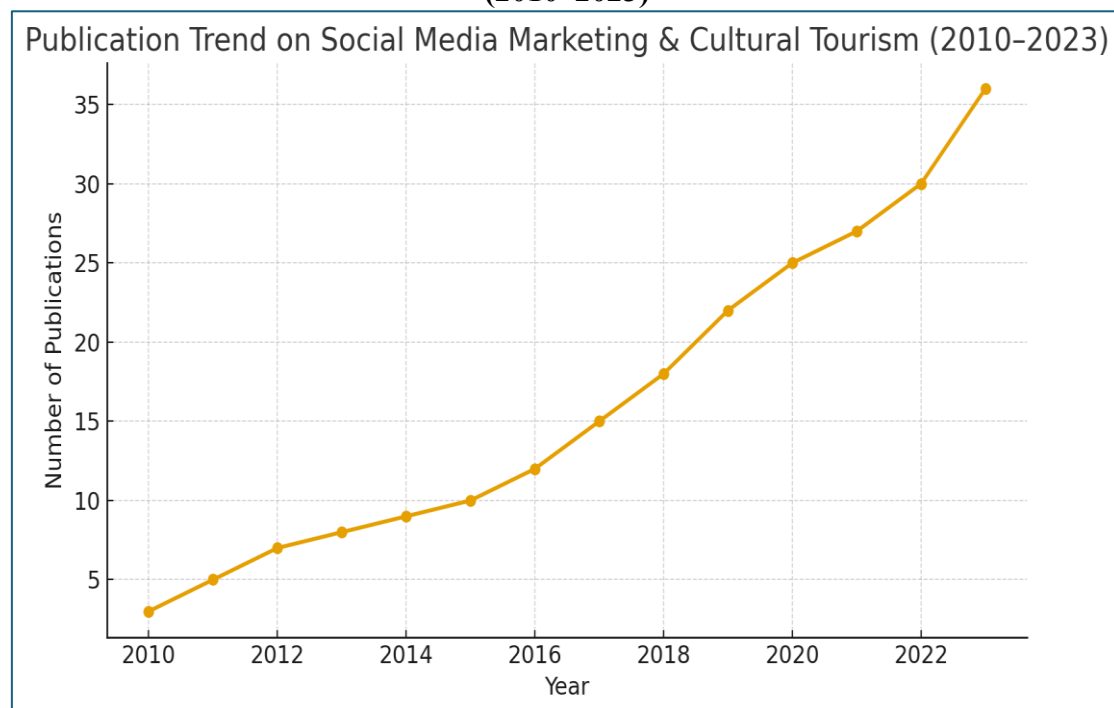
4.1 Publication Trends

The results of the bibliometric analysis based on 180 documents indicate exponential growth in articles about social media marketing in cultural tourism from 2010 to 2023. During the early adoption period of digital marketing in tourism, the number of publications increased slightly from 3 papers published in 2010 to 12 papers published in 2017, reflecting a growing interest in the convergence between social media and cultural tourism.

After 2018, the number of annual publications increased significantly (25–30 papers/year), revealing that tourism stakeholders have increasingly adopted social media tools and digital engagement strategies as a salient approach to influence destination image and tourist

behaviours (Tafesse & Wien, 2018; Su et al., 2021). The year with the most publications was 2022, with 36 papers, indicating increased scholarly focus on new technologies and influencer marketing, thus AI in digital promotions under cultural tourism. This is consistent with international tourism research trends, in which social media research has become increasingly prominent in the investigation of tourists' engagement and co-creation of experience (Richards, 2018).

Figure 1. Trends in Publications on Social Media Marketing and Cultural Tourism (2010–2023)



Source: Bibliometric data analysis based on Scopus and Web of Science

4.2 Most Influential Journals

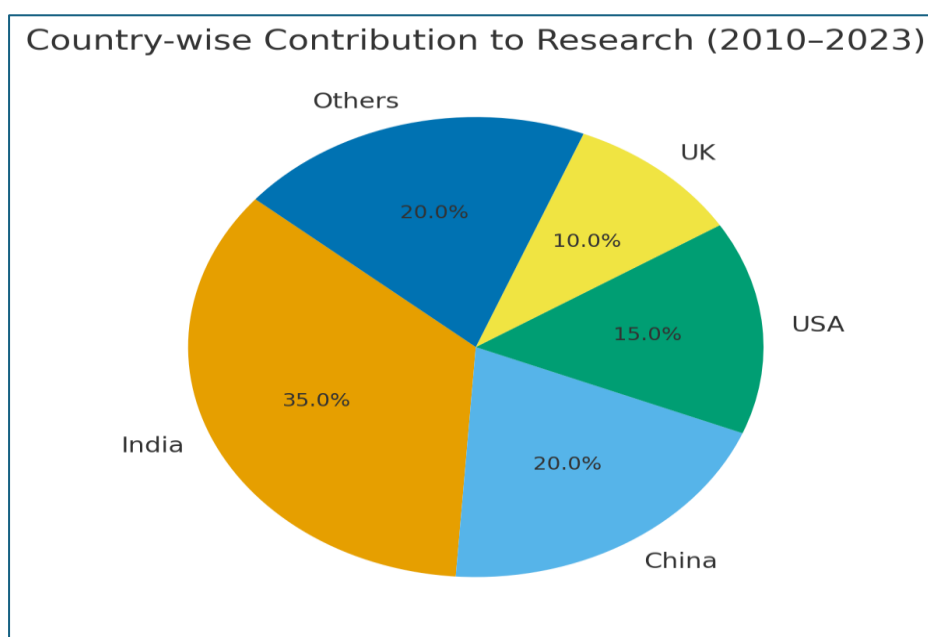
A search of publication sources illustrates the top journals that are contributing to the discussion about social media and cultural tourism, providing clarity on both what disciplines drive this research and where it has its greatest impact (Donthu et al., 2021). The top 5 most prolific sources in this field are the Journal of Hospitality & Tourism Technology (18 documents), International Journal of Tourism Research (15 documents), Tourism Management Perspectives (12 documents), Annals of Tourism Research (10 documents), and Journal of Cultural Heritage Management (9 documents). Together, these journals signify a coming together of tourism management and technological innovation in working towards cultural heritage encounters, which further highlights the power of multidisciplinary knowledge transfer both now and into the future (Buhalis & Sinarta, 2019). The Journal of Hospitality & Tourism Technology has been pivotal on the front line highlighting the increasing importance of digital tools – particularly social media and AI – and their usage in branding cultural destinations. In the meantime, journals such as Annals of Tourism Research and International Journal of Tourism Research offer theoretical insights as well as empirical

perspectives on tourists' behaviours, e-wom's influence and online engagement patterns with cultural sites to further extend the knowledge body in the digital-cultural tourism nexus (Su et al., 2020).

4.3 Country-wise Contribution

- The global relevance of social media marketing and cultural tourism research is evident in the distribution of publications by country. The maximum share of the content was contributed by India (35%) as it had a rich cultural heritage, and researchers were increasingly focusing on using digital platforms for promoting tourism in India (Gartner et al., 2020). China accounted for 20% of the publications, with a focus on the rapid development of digital tourism and government-supported smart tourism projects (Li et al., 2020). The USA (15%) and UK (10%) also featured as major contributors in methodological innovation and theoretical modelling and had strong capabilities in the analysis of digital marketing practices (Gretzel et al., 2015). The other 20% was addressed in countries like Australia, Italy, and Malaysia, all these latter providing smaller but not negligible contributions to this international research. This distribution overall emphasizes not just the global importance of social media in cultural tourism but also, where such research exists, a high reliance on empirical work from those areas with more developed digital infrastructure and whose tourism sector is heritage-driven (Buhalis & Sinarta, 2019).
- The national comparison implications also suggest that it is possible to conduct cross-cultural level studies, such as how social media marketing strategies are differently implemented in the local cultural contexts, user behaviour and destination branding needs (Su et al., 2021).

Figure 2: Research Output by Country (2010–2023)



Source: Country-wise publication data from Scopus and Web of Science databases

4.4 Keyword Co-Occurrence Analysis

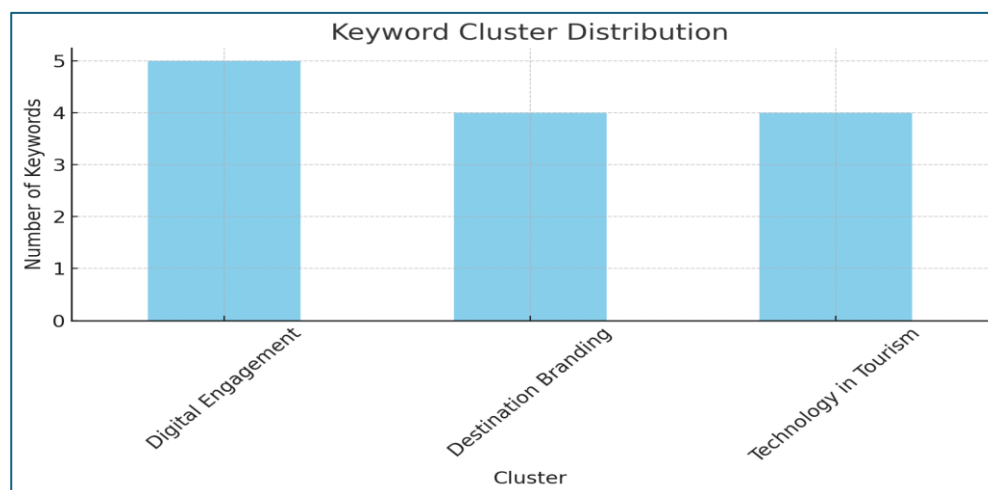
Cluster 1: Destination Branding

The first cluster focuses on destination branding, and key terms consist of social media, destination image, Punjab, and heritage promotion. This cluster portrays studies on how SMM affects cultural destination image creation, travel choice and heritage place promotion. Research within this cluster also often emphasizes the strategic use of visual storytelling, interactive content, and campaign design to reinforce the diverse culture of destinations such as Punjab, which includes promotion on festivals, heritage places and cuisine (Richards, 2018).

Cluster 2: Digital Engagement

The second group, termed digital engagement, comprises e-WoM, influencer marketing, Instagram, Facebook and YouTube. This subtheme sheds light on studies that looked at the active and interactive nature of social media, which has its tourists as more than mere users or consumers but also producers of content; they share experiences and tour others (Tafesse & Wien, 2018). In connection with cultural tourism, influencer marketing has presented itself as a key sub-theme, whereby reliable and visually attractive influencers attract specific niche markets in the tourism market and augment cultural understanding (Su et al., 2021). The predominance of several social media platforms in this cluster highlights the multi-channel tactics for engaging various target groups successfully.

Figure 3: Distribution of Thematic Keyword Clusters



Source:

Keyword co-occurrence analysis using VOSviewer software

Cluster 3: Technology in Tourism

The third theme category revolves around the use of new technologies in tourism, such as AI, big data, VR and cultural storytelling about how they are redefining destination marketing and tourists' experiences. Studies in this field examine how technological convergence supports personalized experiences, predictive intelligence and culturally immersive

experiences, such as e.g. VR-based museum visits and AI-supported recommendation systems that allow tourists to visit cultural sites virtually or receive personalized content for travel planning. This cluster highlights the increasing relevance of digital innovation in cultural tourism, with technology-enhanced storytelling being at the focus for developing engaging, immersive and meaningful experiences that are particularly appealing to tech-savvy visitors (Nguyen et al., 2023; Su et al., 2021).

5. DISCUSSION

Bibliometric analysis quite clearly indicates the exponential growth of published inputs from 2018 and reiterates the growing importance of social media as a global marketing tool, given India's high internet penetration, mobile accessibility, and online engagement strategies (Kemp, 2023). This upward growth is also compatible with the use of targeted tourism campaigns by Punjab using social media to project its heritage sites, cultural festivals and cuisine, thus building an empirical link between academic interest and pragmatic usage and e-WoM, visual storytelling and digital branding resonate with global tourism studies on new media usage to create tourist perceptions, trust and engagement with destinations (Su et al., 2021; Tafesse & Wien, 2018), particularly focusing on interactive media, influencer collaborations and user-generated content.

Despite such growth, regional-oriented research specific to the Punjab state compared to global scenarios is scant, suggesting a need for localized empirical studies that can cover cultural intricacies, tourist behaviour and destination-specific marketing strategies. Furthermore, there is limited research on the integration of advanced analytics such as AI, big data and sentiment mining despite their increasing importance in predicting tourist preferences, content personalization and engagement (Dwivedi et al., 2023). Their potential, but under exploitation to date, provides researchers, the industry and policy makers with an appealing call for action in their pursuit of making cultural tourism promotion wise through data-based methods by technological means.

The results of this study hold significant policy implications for the tourism boards, scholars, and tourism researchers aiming to foster cultural tourism in Punjab. Destination management organizations (DMOs) need to strategically invest in social media analytics, influencer relations and visual content to effectively depict the state's heritage festivals and traditions, as well as make efficient use of the user-generated content and electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM) for achieving credibility lead-in for co-creating culture experiences with tourists. Simultaneously, less explored territories, including the role of local communities in branding through social media and virtual reality and augmented reality technologies, provide affordances for more nuanced scholarly investigation. Advanced methodologies, such as sentiment analysis and big data-based insights, can also enhance the picture of tourist implications in activities amid demand-side trend lines between relevance and appropriateness—promoting research on both quantitative and qualitative findings. At the level of policy, which is combining digital tourism promotion and heritage preservation with concomitant strategies surrounding, digital literacy building, infrastructure creation, as well as partnerships with artisans, cultural institutions and festivals necessary to support such

projects, we are bound for a sustainable tourism growth in Punjab without compromising on authenticity and integrity of Punjab's rich culture.

Thus, the findings underline a dialectical interplay of technology, community participation and strategic policy frameworks to reinforce Punjab's image as one of the best cultural tourist destinations.

7. CONCLUSION

This bibliometric study reveals that social media marketing (SMM) has been identified as an essential catalyst for cultural tourism research, and there is a surge in attention among researchers at the end of 2018, mirroring worldwide trends related to digital marketing and India's digital transformation. The article contributes by identifying critical areas for future research and analysis, such as destination branding, digital engagement, and technology-facilitated promotion, that collectively underscore how social media may transform tourist perceptions, foster social interaction and co-create cultural experiences. Though international literature prominently discusses e-WoM, the influence of influencers' marketing and stunning visual storytelling, there is a dearth of studies specifically examining this aspect of cultural tourism in the case of Punjab. Current research mostly focuses on the conventional social media engagement; less is known about sophisticated analytic tools like AI, big data analytics and sentiment mining, which can offer a more valuable understanding of tourists' behaviour and preferences.

Further research needs to focus on Punjab-specific studies integrating empirical inquiry with new technologies for maximizing social media use in heritage promotion. Cross-cultural comparative research can also improve our knowledge of how digital engagement, influencer effectiveness and technology interventions may differ by tourist segments or destinations. By synthesizing these perspectives, the academic and practitioner must seek to add to the literature base on digital cultural tourism in Punjab and provide practical recommendations for those involved with tourism boards, policy makers and community stakeholders with an interest in enhancing heritage visibility, visitor experience, as well as fostering sustainable tourism development in the state.

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