# THE ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN PROMOTING DARK TOURISM SITES

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***Abstract.*** *Nowadays, social media plays a vital role in shaping how people choose and experience travel destinations, particularly those related to past tragedies and historical suffering. Through personal observation, I have noticed how platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube are turning sites connected to death and loss into places of curiosity and interest. This paper aims to explore how social media encourages dark tourism by analyzing how users react emotionally, behave online, and show curiosity about history. Drawing on works by Lennon and Foley (2000) [6] and Stone (2006) [4], as well as real-world digital trends, this research examines how storytelling on social media enhances interest in dark sites. Some globally recognized places like Chernobyl and Auschwitz are examined, and the potential of similar sites in Uzbekistan is briefly highlighted.*

***Keywords****: dark tourism, social media, user behavior, emotional response, historical memory.*

***Annotatsiya.*** *Hozirgi kunda ijtimoiy tarmoqlar odamlarning sayohat yo'nalishlarini tanlashi va ularni qanday boshdan kechirishini shakllantirishda muhim rol o'ynamoqda, ayniqsa o'tmishdagi fojialar va tarixiy azob-uqubatlar bilan bog'liq joylarga nisbatan. Shaxsiy kuzatuvlarim asosida aytishim mumkinki, Instagram, TikTok va YouTube kabi platformalar o'lim va yo'qotish bilan bog'liq joylarni qiziqish uyg'otuvchi manzillarga aylantirmoqda. Ushbu maqola ijtimoiy tarmoqlar odamlarni tarixiy voqealarga bo'lgan qiziqishini qanday kuchaytirayotgani, foydalanuvchilarning hissiy munosabatlari, onlayn xatti-harakatlari va tarixga bo'lgan qiziqishlari orqali qora turizmni qanday targ'ib qilayotganini o'rganishga qaratilgan. Lennon va Foley (2000) [6] hamda Stone (2006) [4] kabi olimlarning ishlariga, shuningdek zamonaviy raqamli tendensiyalarga tayanib, ushbu tadqiqot ijtimoiy tarmoqlardagi hikoyabozlik qorong'u turizm joylarga bo'lgan qiziqishni qanday oshirayotganini tahlil qiladi. Dunyo miqyosida mashhur bo'lgan Chernobil va Auschwitz kabi joylar misol sifatida ko'rib chiqiladi, shuningdek, O'zbekistondagi shunga o'xshash salohiyatga ega manzillar haqida qisqacha to'xtalib o'tiladi.*

***Kalit so'zlar:*** *qorong'u turizmi, ijtimoiy tarmoqlar, foydalanuvchi xatti-harakati, hissiy reaksiya, tarixiy xotira.*

***Аннотация.*** *В настоящее время социальные сети играют важную роль в формировании того, как люди выбирают и воспринимают туристические направления, особенно связанные с трагическими событиями прошлого и историческими страданиями. На основе личных наблюдений я заметил(а), что такие платформы, как Instagram, TikTok и YouTube, превращают места, связанные со смертью и утратой, в объекты любопытства и интереса. Цель данной работы — исследовать, каким образом социальные*

*сети стимулируют развитие темный туризма, анализируя эмоциональные реакции пользователей, их поведение в интернете и проявление интереса к истории. Основываясь на трудах Леннона и Фоли (2000) [6], Стоуна (2006) [4], а также на актуальных цифровых тенденциях, данное исследование рассматривает, как сторителлинг в социальных сетях усиливает интерес к мрачным местам. В качестве примеров рассматриваются такие всемирно известные объекты, как Чернобыль и Аушвиц, а также кратко обозначается потенциал подобных мест в Узбекистане.*

***Ключевые слова:*** *темный туризм, социальные сети, поведение пользователей, эмоциональная реакция, историческая память.*

**Introduction** Visiting places marked by tragedy, loss, or death—often called dark tourism—has become more common, especially among younger generations active on social media. Unlike traditional tourism, dark tourism is shaped by emotional impact, social memory, and the way people share stories online. As a student in Uzbekistan, I've seen how many young people become interested in such places after seeing dramatic or emotional content about them on platforms like Instagram Reels, TikTok videos, or YouTube vlogs.

Social media doesn't just provide information—it creates emotional experiences and viral interest. A single video or post can inspire thousands to visit historical sites like Auschwitz or Chernobyl. A 2022 study by Walter and McKay found that over half of Gen Z and Millennials admitted they were influenced by social media when choosing dark tourism destinations. The term "dark tourism" was first defined by Lennon and Foley (2000) [6], and further expanded by Stone (2006) [4], who raised questions about the ethics of turning tragedy into spectacle. However, little research has looked specifically at how modern digital platforms contribute to the rise of this tourism form. This article aims to fill that gap by exploring the social, cultural, and emotional drivers behind dark tourism on social media. While Uzbekistan is not commonly associated with dark tourism, it does have sites that reflect trauma, history, and resilience—such as the Nukus Museum or local war memorials. This study uses both international and local examples to investigate how social media transforms digital interest into real-life visits to these emotionally significant places.

**Literature review**

In recent years, interest in dark tourism has notably increased. This type of tourism generally involves visiting locations associated with death, disasters, natural calamities, or human-made tragedies. According to Cohen (2011) [2], travelers to these places can be categorized based on their inner motivations and the kind of experience they seek. Some visit out of simple curiosity or a desire to learn, while others come for personal or cultural reasons.

Zhang and colleagues (2016) [8] highlight those participants in dark tourism often seek elements such as truth, risk, safety, uniqueness, and autonomy. Although visiting these sites may seem risky, the experience itself is expected to be thrilling yet within safe boundaries. Researchers also point out that culture and values play a significant role in how people perceive this form of tourism. Lennon and Foley (2000) [6] emphasize that authenticity — showing events as they truly happened — is a key aspect of dark tourism. Visitors aim to gain a deeper understanding of historical events and appreciate their cultural and historical significance through these sites. Wang and his team (2021) [7] investigated how national culture types influence attitudes toward dark tourism. For example, in collectivist societies, people tend to approach these sites with greater

respect, while in individualistic cultures, visits are often motivated by personal emotional experiences. In summary, dark tourism is a complex phenomenon shaped by various internal and external factors including travelers' goals, perception of safety, cultural values, and interest in real events. Understanding these factors is crucial for effective management and promotion of dark tourism destinations.

**Methodology:** A mixed methods approach combining survey analysis, literature review, survey research, and field observation was used to explore how surveillance is perceived and promoted in Uzbekistan. Content analysis was conducted on social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, and TikTok. The aim was to measure and measure the visual engagement of tourism sites in the online space. Many posts featuring dark tourist attire received a high number of views – some reaching thousands or even millions of people – indicating a high level of engagement. Second, relevant academic publications and journal articles on tourism were reviewed to gain a broader theoretical perspective. The above strategies provided a basis for comparison with the Uzbek context, and provided insights into how this can be studied and interpreted at a global and structural level. In the third stage, a survey was conducted among 100 participants aged 25 to 40 from different regions of Uzbekistan. The respondents included both men and women, and the survey was aimed at determining their awareness of the concept of "dark tourism". They were asked questions about whether they had heard of this type of tourism, whether they had visited such places, and whether they could recognize local dark tourism objects from photos. According to the results, 40 percent of the participants were familiar with the concept and indicated that they had visited such places at least once. The remaining 60% did not know the word or had never seen anything like it. In the final stage, the researcher personally visited various dark tourism destinations in Uzbekistan. During these visits, the organizational state of the destinations, guest data, and emotional impact were observed. This study combines social media content analysis, a review of academic literature, statistical survey results, and field observations to provide an in-depth and contextual analysis of the state of dark tourism in Uzbekistan.

**Results .** The study revealed that awareness of dark tourism in Uzbekistan is still developing. According to the survey conducted among 100 people aged 25–40, 40% of participants were familiar with dark tourism and had visited related sites, while 60% had not heard of it or had never visited such places. Respondents were shown images of local sites and asked to identify whether they recognized or had visited them. Content analysis of social media showed high global interest in dark tourism. For example, an Instagram post about Sleepy Hollow received over 15 million views, 1 million likes, and 3,000 comments. A TikTok video about a night spent in the real Conjuring House gained 5.1 million views and 240,000 likes. These numbers highlight the emotional and viral appeal of dark tourism content online. Personal observation also supported these findings. I visited several potential dark tourism sites in Uzbekistan, including the Savitsky Museum in Nukus (known for its "forbidden art"), the dried Aral Sea region, etc. The visit to the Tashkent Museum, in particular, revealed strong emotional reactions from visitors and confirmed its dark tourism potential, despite limited interpretive materials. Overall, these results show that while dark tourism is not yet widely recognized in Uzbekistan, it has great potential. Both online engagement and on-site observations indicate growing interest and opportunities for development.

**Discussion.** The results of this study indicate that social media platforms, especially Instagram and TikTok, have a significant impact in raising awareness and popularity of dark tourism sites both worldwide and in Uzbekistan. While earlier research mostly focused on regions

like Europe or North America (for example, Seaton, 1996 [3]; Biran & Hyde, 2013 [1]), this study looks at global trends as well as the situation in Uzbekistan. For instance, a video about Sleepy Hollow on Instagram got more than 15 million views and over 1 million likes. Likewise, a TikTok video about mysterious events at "The Real Conjuring House" during the night was watched by 5.1 million people and received 240,000 likes. These examples clearly show how emotionally engaging content on social media can increase public interest in dark tourism. What makes this study different from many others is that it combines global social media data with local views from people in Uzbekistan. Although researchers like Stone (2006) [4] and Lennon & Foley (2000) [6] created important theories about dark tourism, very few have focused on Central Asia. This paper fills that gap by looking closely at key places in Uzbekistan such as the Aral Sea, the Savitsky Museum in Nukus. The survey gave useful information about how much people know. Around 40% of participants said they knew about dark tourism and had visited related places, while 60% were not familiar or had not visited any. This shows there is still a need to promote dark tourism locally through better stories and education about cultural heritage. Also, personal visits added valuable insights. When I visited the former, I noticed many visitors showed strong emotional responses. But the information available there was limited, showing both the emotional power of the site and the need to improve how it is presented. These observations support the idea that this place has great potential as a dark tourism destination. In summary, this study combines analysis of social media worldwide, a national survey, and direct field visits to give a full picture of dark tourism today. Unlike many studies that focus only on one area or method, this research connects global trends with local experiences, offering a clearer and more practical understanding of how dark tourism is growing and being promoted.

**Conclusion.** This study found that social media platforms like Instagram and TikTok are really important in getting people interested in dark tourism, both around the world and here in Uzbekistan. By looking at global social media trends, gathering survey responses from locals, and visiting dark tourism sites in person, this research gives a clearer and more complete picture than many past studies that mostly focused on Western countries. What makes this study different is that it combines international trends with local experiences from special places in Uzbekistan — like the Aral Sea, the Savitsky Museum in Nukus. The strong emotions people feel when visiting these sites, along with the way dark tourism content spreads on social media, show how much potential this type of tourism has to grow. Going forward, it would be helpful to explore how storytelling on social media — using short videos or engaging stories — can better attract and educate visitors. Also, more attention and care should be given to preserving and explaining these local dark tourism spots, so they can both teach people and honor their history.

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