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BEYOND REGISTAN: HOW SHORT-FORM DIGITAL STORYTELLING COULD

PROMOTE LESSER-KNOWN CULTURAL EXPERIENCES IN SAMARKAND

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Abstract

Samarkand is widely known for its historic monuments, especially Registan Square, Shah-i-Zinda, and Gur-e-Amir. These places are important, but a visitor's experience of the city can include much more than its best-known sights. Traditional crafts, local food, neighbourhood stories, and the people who keep these traditions alive can also help visitors understand the city. This article explores how short-form digital storytelling on platforms such as Instagram Reels, TikTok, and YouTube Shorts could help introduce these less-promoted cultural experiences to potential tourists. The study uses a qualitative literature-based approach. It reviews research on social media, destination image, digital storytelling, and heritage tourism, and considers how these ideas may apply to Samarkand. The review suggests that short videos are most useful when they do more than show attractive views: they should tell a clear story, provide reliable information, represent local people respectfully, and give viewers a practical reason to explore beyond the main attractions. The article also identifies risks, including simplified cultural explanations, staged experiences, misleading information, and the concentration of attention on already popular places. It recommends that tourism organisations work with local guides, artisans, food businesses, and residents when creating content. Since no original survey or platform data were collected, the

findings are interpretive rather than statistical. The article concludes that digital storytelling could support a broader and more balanced visitor experience in Samarkand if it is planned with local participation and cultural care.

Keywords: Samarkand, digital storytelling, short-form video, cultural tourism, social media, local experiences.

Introduction

Tourism promotion has changed in recent years because travellers can discover places through short videos and posts before they decide where to go. A few seconds of video may encourage someone to search for a destination, save a place for later, or ask a friend about it. For a historic city such as Samarkand, this creates an opportunity to explain its culture in a format that many people already use in their daily lives. However, the purpose should not be simply to make another attractive video of a famous monument.

The aim of this article is to explore how short-form digital storytelling could promote lesser-known cultural experiences in Samarkand and to identify the benefits, limitations, and practical steps involved. It asks what makes this content useful, how it could connect visitors with experiences beyond the main landmarks, and what risks should be managed. The article uses a review of existing research rather than original survey data. Its purpose is to develop a focused discussion and recommendations that could later be tested through a small study involving tourists and local tourism providers.

Literature Review

Social media and the image of a destination

Research supports the idea that social media content can influence how people imagine a destination. Sultan et al. (2021), for example, studied social-media-based content and destination image, showing why online content matters when people compare places to visit. Kim et al. (2017) also examined how the quality of tourism

information on social media relates to destination image formation. These studies suggest that attractive content may catch attention, but information quality matters too. A video that looks beautiful but gives no useful details may inspire interest without helping a person decide what to do.

Research focused on Uzbekistan is also relevant here. Fayzullaev, Heldt Cassel, and Brandt (2021) found that official tourism images and Instagram posts often present Uzbekistan through its Silk Road heritage and historic traditions. Eitzenberger and Thimm (2024), who compared residents' views in Samarkand with the image held by people who had not visited Uzbekistan, found a difference between how residents see the country and how outsiders imagine it. These studies do not examine short videos about lesser-known experiences directly, but they suggest that online promotion can shape what people expect from a destination. Sobirov et al. (2015) also discussed the role of social media and user-created content in tourism development, including the contribution of researchers based in Uzbekistan.

Digital storytelling and cultural tourism

Digital storytelling means using digital media to tell a story rather than simply presenting information. In tourism, a story might follow an artisan making a piece of pottery, explain the meaning of a local dish, or show how a street has changed over time. The story can combine spoken words, captions, sound, images, and a short sequence of events. When it is done well, the viewer receives both an emotional impression and some useful information Kasemsarn and Nickpour (2025) reviewed digital storytelling in cultural and heritage tourism and discussed its potential to engage younger audiences through social media. Their review is useful for this topic because it considers not only the technology but also the way stories are designed for a particular platform. A short video has limited time, so the creator must choose a clear focus. Trying to explain the entire history of a monument in thirty seconds is likely to

result in rushed information. Showing one detail and explaining why it matters may be more effective.

Samarkand and the problem of attention

Recent research on heritage interpretation in Samarkand has examined how visitors encounter information at heritage sites and has identified issues such as uneven interpretation, multilingual information, and the integration of digital tools (Shaikhon, 2026). This makes the topic especially relevant to the city. Digital storytelling could be one way to provide additional context before a visit, while on-site signs, guides, and museum information would still be needed to support the experience.

What previous research does not fully answer

Although earlier studies explain how social media shapes destination image and how digital storytelling can support cultural tourism, they do not directly establish whether short-form videos increase interest in lesser-known experiences in Samarkand. This article addresses that gap by bringing the existing ideas together and considering how they could be applied locally.

Methodology

Research design

This study uses a qualitative review of existing literature. The study looks at how short videos might help promote cultural experiences in Samarkand that are not as widely known as the main landmarks. A literature-based approach is appropriate for an exploratory article because it allows ideas from earlier studies to be compared and applied to a specific tourism context. It does not, however, provide direct evidence of what every tourist or local resident thinks.

Sources and selection

Relevant sources were selected for their connection to digital storytelling, social media, destination image, heritage tourism, and Uzbekistan. The review includes peer-reviewed studies and information from the UNESCO World Heritage Centre. Research

about Uzbekistan was included to keep the discussion connected to the local context rather than relying only on international examples.

Analysis procedure

No survey, interview, experiment, or systematic analysis of social media posts was conducted for this article. Therefore, the paper does not report invented participant numbers, engagement rates, or visitor statistics. Its results should be understood as a reasoned synthesis of published research. A future empirical study could test the recommendations by analysing a sample of videos or interviewing visitors and local service providers.

Findings and Results

Short videos need a clear story, not only attractive images

The literature suggests that short videos are more informative when they follow one simple story. For example, a video could show how a local craft is made, introduce the person who makes it, and explain where visitors can learn more. This approach gives viewers a reason to remember the experience instead of showing only attractive scenery. The story should remain accurate and should not exaggerate what visitors can expect. Local voices are another important part of this kind of content. Guides, artisans, cooks, museum staff, and residents may explain details that are not obvious from a photograph. Their participation can also help prevent local culture from being presented only through an outsider's point of view. For instance, a short video about a traditional meal could include the person who prepares it, the reason certain ingredients are used, and the occasions when the dish is usually served.

Content could help spread interest beyond the main landmarks

For this to work, the recommended experience must be real, accessible, and accurately described. Videos should include basic practical details when possible, such as location, opening times, booking requirements, or whether a visit needs to be arranged in advance. Without this information, interest may not turn into a visit. In

addition, promotion should be coordinated with local providers so that small businesses are not overwhelmed by unexpected demand. Overall, useful videos should tell one clear story, include local voices, give accurate information, and show respect for the people and places featured. These features offer a starting point for creating content that supports tourism without reducing cultural heritage to a visual trend.

Discussion

What the findings mean for Samarkand

Samarkand already appears often in travel content, so simply publishing more videos may not be enough. The city is already visually recognisable, and its major monuments naturally attract attention. The more specific opportunity is to use short-form storytelling to make the visitor experience more varied and informative. This means showing how history connects with people, skills, food, and everyday places, rather than relying only on familiar monument shots. The pilot should measure more than views and likes. These numbers show attention but not necessarily learning or visits. More useful indicators could include saves, requests for practical information, clicks to a verified location page, bookings where relevant, and feedback from the featured local partner. Short interviews with viewers could also explore whether the videos helped them understand the experience and whether they considered visiting it. These measures would make future claims more reliable.

Possible risks and how to reduce them

One risk is that promotion may concentrate attention on a small number of places or businesses that already have strong online visibility. To avoid this, organisers could rotate the featured experiences and work with a range of local partners, including small operators that do not have large marketing budgets. Selection should be transparent so that promotion does not depend only on personal connections or payment. One limitation is that this article uses published research rather than new information collected from tourists or tourism businesses in Samarkand. The paper

therefore cannot claim that short-form storytelling has increased visits, improved satisfaction, or raised local income. Its recommendations are possible directions for practice, not measured outcomes.

Conclusion

This study considered how short videos could introduce visitors to cultural experiences in Samarkand that are less visible online. Short videos may be more useful when they tell a clear story, include local voices, give reliable information, and explain how viewers can experience a place themselves. They may also offer a way to connect famous monuments with crafts, food, small museums, and neighbourhood stories that add depth to a visit. Because the article relies on published studies rather than fieldwork, the possible benefits still need to be tested. A small pilot project with local guides, artisans, cultural institutions, and tourism businesses could help determine which formats are useful and how success should be measured. In the long term, the value of digital storytelling should be judged not only by how many people watch a video but also by whether it helps visitors learn, encourages respectful behaviour, and creates fair opportunities for local participants.

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