



Social Media in Tourism- A Double-Edged Sword

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ABSTRACT

Extensive spread of the Internet and speedy technological advancement have revolutionized all industries in the World specifically tourism. The presence of the information and communication technology have fundamentally change the way how tourists collect detailed information, how do they can carefully map decision substitutes, how they book their travel and how they share their unique travel experience with others. A vital step forward in the progress of the internet has been made by a noteworthy growth in the popularity of social media platforms. Social media plays a very important role in tourism which is an information based industry. Consumers need information that can assist them in the process of travel planning and making decisions related to selection of tourism destination and other travel related products. Social media has also extended the reach of industry as now they can easily target consumers sitting far away without even meeting them. Destination marketer use social media before the travel so as to engage and inform the tourists, during the travel so as to facilitate at destination and after the travel to remember and share experiences. But social media in tourism marketing can be both an aid and a threat as social media influences the tourism industry both in positive and negative ways, as the decisions of prospective travellers have been strongly affected by comments and personal experiences of other users on social media. The main objective of the paper is to understand the relationship between social media and destination marketing and to examine the positive and negative impact of social media marketing in tourism industry.

Keywords: social media, destination, tourism marketing

Introduction

Over the years tourism have based majorly on the power of word of mouth marketing; it used to be our family and friends who motivated and helped us in planning our travels. However, nowadays with the development of the information and communication technology, the word of mouth information has stretched beyond a limited group to the whole world. As an inseparable part of digital technology, social media provide an advantage to the tourists to get connected with suggestions and opinions of millions of people, including friends, family and the travellers they have never even met. Tourism organizations have taken benefit of this remarkable technology by increasing the advertisement and promotion of their destinations and other tourism related products on social media platform with the aim of creating a distinct image of their tourism products in the mind of existing and prospective travellers as well as to reach out the masses.

A tourism destination is a unique entity which has in term of tourism some unique properties and conditions which differentiate it from other destinations. Today's visitors have a large substitute of destinations to select from, but very less time to make a buying decision. It is very important for marketers to promote their destinations in order to remain competitive in the era of strong competition. In order to develop basic elements of the destination, to attract potential tourists to visit a

destination and to effectively use the facilities and services within in the destination, marketing strategies are designed by the tourism marketers with the sole aim of satisfying the needs and aspirations of visitors. Social media can be seen as dominating marketing tool in the current tourism marketing scenario. Nowadays tourists create an image about a destination and other travel products on the basis of their past experience, press reports, word of mouth and common beliefs, before visiting to a particular destination (Baloglu & Brinberg, 1997 and Chon, 1992). An attractive destination has the power to satisfy the needs and wants of the visitors by providing them individual benefits (Mayo& Jarvis, 1981). The development of information technology and their increasing use has drastically changed the relationship between the destination and the travellers. To remain competitive a destination should be successfully promoted in the target markets. Social media has made the travel companies accountable for what they communicate, promote and promise through its various channels. Use of social media marketing by the tourism organization generally helps them to distribute and communicate information to the masses. Some of the major activities in which the marketing organizations can engage on the social platform are:

- It helps the organizations to collect the user generated content from the blogs, comments, photos and videos which are generally posted by the visitors after the trip to destination.
- It helps the organization to add photos and videos of the destination on different social media channels so as to provide a cue about the destination to the prospective travellers.
- To share new stories about the destination to the group of people that have indicated an interest in the destination.
- Helps in encouraging word of mouth suggestions and recommendations. The positive comment and recommendation of the previous traveller may influence others to go and visit the destination.
- It helps the marketing organizations to get feedbacks about their tourism products from the past travellers.

Social media in tourism industry is a double edged sword which has both its positive as well as negative impacts. Whereas, comments and information shared about a destination by the past traveller on social media

persuade a prospective traveller to visit a particular destination, in the same way it may stop a prospective traveller to go to that particular destination if the negative word of mouth is spread about the destination on social media by the past travellers. Thus, it is very important for destination marketers to use social media platforms for marketing in such a way that it will make the destination competitive as compared to other destinations so as to minimize the negative impacts of social media marketing on tourism destination's image.

Literature Review

The tourism destination's business has revolutionized both in terms of a sales channel and as a source of information due to advancement in internet. Traveller's assessments, photos, videos, stories, suggestions and recommendations and especially the digital marketing are bringing destinations closer to the prospective visitors irrespective of where in the world they are located. There are several ways used to collect research papers and studies in order to understand the relationship between social media and tourism marketing. One of the methods was Google scholar search engine which provided me promising research papers and literature on keywords like – social media, tourism marketing and destination. The most helpful piece of paper that was found was on- Role of Social Media in Tourism Marketing, which was published in 2015 by Anwasha Mukherjee and Manasa Nagabhushanam. Apart from this a number of literature and articles that defined the effects and use of social media marketing were collected.

Tourism Destination

Traditionally, tourism destinations are defined as geographical areas, territories, such as a country, a town or an island, which have legislative and political framework for tourism marketing and planning (Davidson & Maitland, 2000). Destinations in simple words, can be defined as the places toward which people travel and where they choose to stay for a certain period of time (Leiper, 1995). Destinations can also be defined as geographical areas, which are considered by tourists as a unique entity, and where the products and services are designed specifically in order to meet the needs and wants of tourists (Cooper, Fletcher, Gilbert, Shepherd & Wanhill, 1998). A tourism destination is basically a perceptual concept, which is interpreted by the travellers subjectively, and where combination of products, services, facilities and experiences are provided locally (Buhalis, 2000). Unlike other products, tourism products are purchased

in advance before their use and are generally away from the point of consumption. Travellers, thus base their travel decisions on description that is provided in advance about the destination. Thus, in order to enhance the visitor's experience and tourism destination competitiveness it is very important to provide accurate and timely information to the prospective travellers (Buhalis, 1998). Therefore, the tourist decisions regarding the purchase of a tourism destination based on certain emotional and irrational factors such as word of mouth, advertisements, journals and uniqueness of destination. In the modern era, potential visitors are ready to more in case the quality product is easily accessible. Social media create a good opportunity for the destination marketers to maintain good and long term relationships with the busy customers (Yadav & Arora, 2012). Technology evolution, globalisation and changing customers' needs and attitudes have increased the level of information that the destination marketers have to analyse in order to remain competitive in dynamic tourism market. Social media nowadays plays a very important role as a marketing tool to enhance the reputation of the destination. Tourism is a fast growing industry which relies heavily on the use of internet and online transaction (Werthner and Ricci, 2004).

Social Media

Social media refers to those web applications that allow the users to share and post their contents. They provide four different benefits: collaboration, communication, community and collective intelligence opportunities (Jucan & Rotariu, 2013). Most commonly used social media applications are- Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn, Google +, Flickr, YouTube, Pinterest, Flickr. According to some authors social media is classified into six types: social networking sites, virtual social worlds, content communities, virtual games world, blogs and collaborative projects (A.M., Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Like other industries the increasing use of social media has also impacted the tourism industry. Use of social media has taken the travel and tourism industry to a new level. Social media helps the visitors to collect first-hand information from the other travellers and to make decision about the experiences and destination. Information gathering is possible through story writing, blogging, experience writing, travelogues that are published by the past travellers on their personal social networking sites and destination's site. The most important source of information in tourism are gogobot.com, trippy.com, wanderfly.com, tripit.com, tripadvise.com and online content. Social

media allow the destination to contact visitors at relatively low cost and higher level of efficiency as compared to traditional communication tools (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). In order to remain competitive in the market, a tourism destination must be different from other destinations (Porter, 1996). The destination will be different from others with a strong and systematic marketing and communication strategy with special focus on social media. Since, the social media is overcrowded with information, it is very difficult to attract attention of the users- however some schemes are there like novelty, involvement of celebrities, chance to win, competition, exclusivity, consonance and attractive geographical design.

Research Objectives: -The purpose of the paper is:

- To understand the relationship between social media and tourism marketing so as to understand the concept of social media marketing in tourism industry.
- To study the both positive and negative impacts of social media marketing in tourism industry.

Relationship of Tourism Marketing with Social Media

In order to sustain the success, profitability and benefits the national and international tourism sector should be in position to apply the advancements in the field of social media in its own promotional and marketing activities. In this continuously changing environment, it is very important to ensure the efficient and effective use of internet and digital technology for tourism activities (Yavuz & Haseki, 2012). Consumer awareness and dynamic market scenario makes it compulsory for the marketing organisations to take more strategic on product development, pricing, publicity choices and place factors (Meydan & Bayram, 2013). Social media and social networking sites act as major marketing tools and perform many functions. These tools generally provide the platform to the users to collect information about product and services, raise their awareness, share their opinions, after travel experiences and travel assessments, whereas, for companies it provide an opportunity to market their destination, enhance brand loyalty and to create long term relationships (Albayrak, 2013).

Use of social media as a marketing tool provides competitive advantages to companies over their competitors. Nowadays number of people take part in social networking sites thus there are high chances that

information will be exchanged rapidly (Magnold & Faulds, 2009). Due to increase in the consciousness level of customers, availability of information and possibility of examining many comments in digital environment in this globalized world make it obvious for tourism destinations to be examined by consumers in a much faster, easier and economical way. Many people use internet for planning their travel. They generally visit several social media sites before actually making a travel decision because of the reason that they believe that social assessment to be beneficial for their purchasing decisions (Sarısık & Özbay, 2012). As the social media sites include comments and assessments, they influence the image of the destination in the mind of prospective travellers and thus impact the loyalty of travellers toward the destination (Wang & Hsieh, 2011). Certain studies conducted on the use of social media as a marketing tool concluded that tourism industry is getting benefit due to advancement in social media as it allows the companies to conduct mass promotions. Most of the companies use social media platforms for destination marketing because they have seen the increasing usage of social media in regular lifestyles by the masses and the awareness quotient of social media is much higher than other marketing tools. Certain social media campaigns are conducted across the years to promote the destination to the whole world. The other reason of using social media as a marketing tool is that it provides a less expensive approach to marketing a tourism destination. Nowadays travellers don't trust ads that focuses on attributes and speciality of destination, they requires a personal touch, intelligent, communicative and creative message that include empathy and emotions. The DMO's focuses on participation of social media marketing and make sure that their presence on social media is so strong that their destination USP is always available whenever potential travellers search for a similar destination.

Positive and Negative Impacts of Social Media Marketing in Tourism Industry

In general, the potential traveller, who want to collect information on destination that will be accommodate for the first time will be influenced by the comment and opinions shared by the past travellers on the social sites. The main objective of every tourism organization is to reach the masses to hold the reservation. And the most economical and easy way is to achieve this is through internet. As the potential traveller will be influenced by the comments and statements on social media at the reservation stage, thus the reputation and brand name of the destination depend on these comments. Thus social

media impact the travel very deeply. While the positive statements will include the good experience and satisfaction of the visitors, negative comments will include disappointments and bad experiences. So it is very important to analyse the impact of negative comments on destination image and traveller decisions. Social media impact the decisions of the travellers before the travel, during the travel and after the travel; before, to search the alternatives, to reduce travel preferences, to confirm whether the choice is right, to look for entertainment and accommodation facilities; during, to get information about local facilities, to stay connected with friends and family, to comment on sites to share their experiences with others; after, to share photos with friends after travel, to assess and comment on the destination sites and to make decisions for next travel plan (Fotis, 2012). On social media sites travellers can easily access the information about rates, attributes and experiences of the past travellers. As the social media contents is easily accessible and very influential, thus it can either put-off potential visitor or encourage them to book. Social media also impacted the customer services and satisfaction. Presence on social media assist the marketers to address the complaints and problems of customers so as to create a strong reputation among current and future customers. Responding to customers complaints helps companies to humanize their brand and to create a perception in the mind of customers that they are valued. The major negative impact of social media are the negative comments and opinions about your destination and product that are shared by the past travellers on the destination sites and on their personal sites just because of their bad experience and dissatisfaction. These comments are highly visible on the destination site and will be visible to those who are connected with you on your personal networking sites. Using social media tools for marketing is good idea but it is very difficult to calculate the ROI for all campaigns. A single piece of content becomes a topic of interaction between multiple users, on social media platforms. Social media interactions like likes, shares, comments, re-tweets helps to shape the image of the destination, but it can turn against marketing activities, if the social interactions are negative. This negative interaction will not spread only to followers, but also to the persons who like, share and re-tweet the content.

Suggestions and recommendations

- The most important thing that the marketing organisations have to take into account is that both current travellers and prospective traveller can share

any type of information. In order to avoid any trouble it is very important for marketers to maintain an ethical code of conduct in their marketing perspectives.

- Ethical code of conduct simply means that marketers should not provide misleading information and incorrect advertisement content. Because, information that is provided in official site will generally influence the travellers perceptions about that particular destination. But when the delivery is not according to promises and when there is delivery gap it will generally create dissatisfaction in the mind of customer and create a negative image of the destination in customer's mind and it results in negative comments that are shared by the customers on social sites.
- To increase positive impacts and to reduce negative impacts it is important for marketers to access their destination's site to check the latest comments.
- It is very important to address the complaints of the customers and to resolve their problem. Because it will create positive image regarding responsiveness of company.

Conclusion

This paper is based solely on the review of literature and studies conducted on the usage of social media by tourism organizations, relationship between social media and tourism marketing and impacts of social media marketing. Tourism is an important source of revenue and employment for many destinations, but due to change in technology and media advancements it is very important for marketers to change their promotion and communication strategies and the way they promote themselves in the dynamic market. Adoption of advance technology and new media strategies are crucial for the survival of destination. Nowadays visitors don't trust on advertisements that focus on features and benefits of the destination. They want to be the part of destination creation and want to make purchase decision based on relationships. Social media assist the marketers to provide interesting content, use creativity and motivate interactive communication. Apart from only positive benefits social media also have its own negative impacts which may deteriorate the image of destination in long run.. But these negative impacts can be minimized if the marketers will actively address the problems of customers and take other strategic measures to control the negative impacts. Undoubtedly, social media is very

effective marketing tool to reach the target audience, creating destination awareness and to communicate with the users, but in order to avoid its adverse effects it is very important to avoid posting any content which is sensitive to your prospective and existing customers to manage it professionally.

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