

IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON TOURISM INDUSTRY

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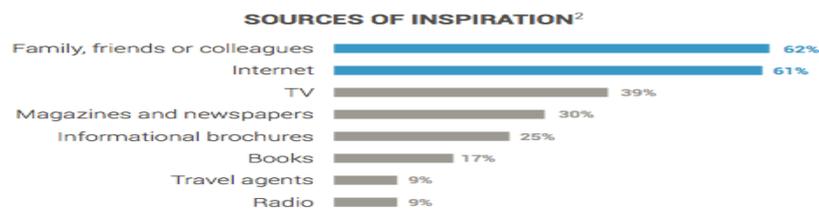
ABSTRACT

Social media has been playing a great role in our every day's life and in every industry, it plays a crucial role in one or other way. Tourism industry also as it helps in easy decision making for individual/traveler through the information available on different social networking platform. This paper provides a conceptual framework- 'how social media is playing a crucial role in framing individual preference and choice while making travelling decision'. The study states that individual rely more on experience and reviews shared by other individual rather than media advertisement or tourism websites as well it has been a great source of information for travelers to make a better choice regarding particular destination. It states that social media has been a great basis for brand building and recognition and social media plays a substantial role in stimulating traveler's decision.

KEYWORDS: Social Media, Social Networking Sites, Travel, Tourism.

Introduction

Social media has left its impact on all the sectors and it is majorly used as a source of communication and to gather information rather than meeting in a person. Social media is one that is used for leisure as well as for the business purpose. Face book, Twitter and YouTube are major websites which has influenced each and every sector. It has bought its effect on tourism sector too in a way where people share their experiences and reviews and the information available on the social media sites helps us to make our prospective choice. Social media helps in making decision easier and make a better choice as to which place to travel. The social media has given a great contribution to provide some good and not so good feedbacks and contributions. A recent research showed that more than half of the people change their decisions and plans after researching on various social portals. It helps the individually to virtually see the destination online and their reviews helps in making a better decision. The information is available in many forms like blogs, tagging, videos, reviews and many more medium. The tourism industry has also adopted social media as their way of advertising or marketing as it has bought great revenue and outcome as the information available on social media helps in decreasing the uncertainties and providing more relevant and real information. The research paper will focus on how the social media has helped in influencing the customers buying behavior and what are the variables that affect the tourism industry by using social media. The study will aim to understand the importance of social media in tourism industry and its impact on the tourism industry.



Source from Ipsos Media Ct, November, 2013

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Impact of Social Media in India

For today's generation, its mere part of their life to be social media savvy, most of us spend lot of time everyday on different social media sites like Face book, Twitter, YouTube, pin interest, etc. use of web has extended its way to a deeper path that is not just for emailing or for searching a particular thing but a way of staying update and interacting through chats, video sharing or through image sharing or updating some the status and many more. Social media has become a major part in our life's as we see that out of five persons every second person is using social media to share their happiness or achievements through the use of different social media portals.

On the other hand if we will see it from the company's perspective it has been a great source of creating awareness among the customers about their brand and products. It is a way through which the companies create an image in their prospective customers and through which they interact with them and try to know their views in order to improve their services. Social media is a greatest source of entertainment and leisure too. It has spread its wings in each and every aspects thus, it's playing multiple roles in everyone's life not in a way of communicating only but also in other aspects.

The rise in the social media users are increasing rapidly due to the availability of the smart phones and the network. Being a social media user what we see is what we believe in, so whatever information or the new product we see and it stimulate us to try that. This is the case with the products to so the companies are finding ways to reach maximum customers through the social media. According to a survey it has been stated that the users of social media are increasing rapidly. The study states that in 2018, there will be around 283 million social network users in India, up from close to 216.5 million in 2016.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study are:

- To understand the impact and importance of social media on tourism industry.
- To analyze the variables those, affect the decision making of consumer due to use of social media.
- To access the effect of using social media and to determine as what factors are the major source that lead to the changes in the customer's decisions.

Scope of the Study

The study first analyzed the variable that affected the impact of social media on tourism and then it analyzed the contribution of social media to the tourism industry and how it has affected the decision making of travelers in pre-stage of travelling.

Research Methodology

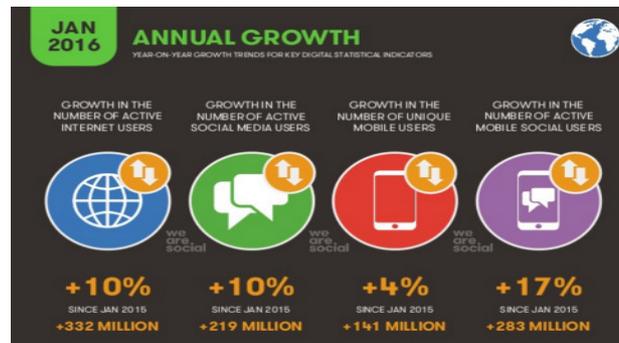
In order to reach the aim of our study to analyze the variables and the contribution of social media in tourism sector all social media related publications were identified and gathered from hospitality and tourism database and Google scholar. To achieve the objective of our study and to reach the conclusions and discussions of the study keywords of social media, social networking sites, travel and tourism were used to search the social media related articles and other research works done on it. Identified articles are thoroughly studied to understand its conclusions and suggestions as well as the references cited in the articles were also gone through. The research started with understanding the overview of the term social media and with that understanding the impact of on a traveler. This was followed by the analysis of tourism sector with reference to social media. Furthermore, as per the analyzing and concluding of the previous research a connection was established which has helped in framing our analysis and conclusions.

Tourism and Social Media

Social media has been defined in various ways. Social media is a wide term and defines as the way of interacting through blogs and forums, photographs, audio records, videos, links, profile pages on social networking sites (Eley & Tilley, 2009). Social media is described as an associate, user created online content (Roberts & Kraynak, 2008). With the advancement of social media, internet has been evolved from being the diffusion medium to a participatory platform through which people become the media themselves for sharing information. Social media is defined as the group of applications which allows the formation and alter the content developed and based on the technological fundamentals of internet (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Different social media applications like wikis, blogs, social network

sites i.e., face book or instagram or the media sharing websites like youtube have gained the massive recognition in the online tourist communities. As well as it has boosted the use of these social media applications (Gretzel, 2006, Pan et al., 2007). With the growing trend of internet and advancement, tourist are using their gadgets like smart phones laptops and tablets to search the information regarding their visit and to get information about the tourist destinations. (Wrang and Fesenmair, 2013, Santos and Santos, 2014) Social media have been generally take up by tourists to search, arrange, share, and comment on their travel tale and know-how through blogs (Blogger and Twitter), online society (Face book and Trip Advisor), media sharing sites (YouTube and Flickr and other ways in a collaborative way. The *World Travel Market 2011 Industry Report* announced that more than one-third of all leisure travelers choose their destinations on the basis of reviews and information available on social media sites like Trip Advisor and Face book (Koumelis, 2011).

Considering the comments available on online communities such as Trip Advisor, helps hotels and other travel-related companies to be aware of what their visitors like and dislike. With the increasing trend of and the benefit of social media provide copious tourism companies has amalgamated social media applications to their websites to increase customers' travel information searching experience (Fuchs, Scholochov, & Höpken, 2009; Sánchez-Franco & Rondan- Cataluña, 2010). Improvements and gains provide advantage over competitors when social networking sites are used for marketing purposes. Large numbers of people are moving towards social media makes it possible to spread the news more rapidly in a short span of time which in a way provides opportunity to expand swiftly (Magnold & Faulds, 2009).



Sourced from Statista.com (2016)

Social Media V/s Traditional Media

Social Media has bought the shift from traditional means to use of social portals and websites. What differentiates social media from traditional media is user generated contents and user participation. Social media serves as an easy source to share the information and has easy and wide reach. Traditional medium is a one way communication whereas the social media provides an opportunity to interact and share views and experience about a particular situation or the place. Social media helps in creating communities of like minds are free to share their viewpoint which can be helpful for other travelers. As the number of internet users increased it has bought significant impact on the business too.

Social media and multimedia: India

Behaviour of internet users



www.DigitalStrategyConsulting.com

Source from Universal McCann, Mar 2008

Impact of Social Media on Travel and Tourism

Social Media has its impact on each aspects of our lives with its great reach it has affected the tourism industry too. Comments or reviews on social media sites are considered important when the traveler makes some travel plans. Travelers who are planning for a holiday accommodate themselves first with the information. Through the use of internet travelers easily get the information about the place and helps in making easy reservations. This helps in building positive effect and creating a satisfaction level of the tourist. The comments and feedbacks on social media also influence the tourist decision at the time of reservation stage, as well as helps in building brand recognition and reliability. The online feedbacks have both the positive as well as negative feedbacks, the negative feedbacks include the negative or the bad experiences thus the negative comments too have to be analyzed efficiently. The consumers look for negative evaluation in particular (Sachse & Magnold, 2011). There are enormous monthly visitors on social media who are keenly searching the travel information from different sources such as Trip Advisor, Cox & Kings, Make My Trip and the likes. Social networking sites helps travelers in making decisions and helps in sharing their experiences about the place hotel or any particular destination. Social networking sites are becoming a vital way of promoting products and a way of communication (Indian Express, 2014). According to Zeng (2013) a fine plan to endorse selling is by making use of social media to sell tourism goods apart from it social media can be also used to announce the most recent promotions.

Social Media Influence on Consumers

Social media plays a great role while the traveler is making the travelling decision. The pre Phase of the traveler's trip is affected by the information and comments available online and further leads to change in the decision. A research by Google stated that 84% of the leisure tourist use the internet for making their travelling plans (Torres, 2010). The growing popularity of websites which has the user generated contents by travelers, there are number of research scholars who have laid the dominant significance of social media in the research stage of the travelers planning process (Cox, Burgess, Sellitto, & Buultjens, 2009; Lo, McKercher, Lo, Cheung, & Law, 2011; Tussyadiah, Park, & Fesenmaier, 2011; Yoo & Gretzel, 2010). Huang, Basu, and Hsu (2010). Through the information available online the visitors on the websites are able to have a look at the feedbacks of the travelers who have uploaded their pictures or videos of the place of their visit either on their personal page or on the tourism websites. Apart from this the Word of Mouth is also a major factor to influence the tourist decision. People take social media as the trusted source of information as the information available there is through their friends or relatives so its being a trusted source for them. Travelers often make their decision on the basis of the previous travelers experience as it helps in avoiding risk and to build up their satisfaction level (Fotis, Buhalis & Rossides, 2012). Travelers usually evaluate various online website while making the travelling decision in order to lessen the risk of making wrong choice (Jeng & Fesenmaier, 2002). Trip Advisor is recently the biggest travel website, which has 74 million of active users who are continuously checking the website to check the reviews and make decision while planning a trip (R'athonyi, 2013).

Promoting Tourism Industry through Social media

Social media plays an important role in promoting and marketing the tourism industry. It has helped in promoting the world's diversity and has given positive contribution towards preserving our natural and cultural heritage. The ministry of tourism has formulated various policies and programmes for the development and promotion of tourism. The World Travel and Tourism Council (2015) stated that \$120 billion USD (8.31 Lakh Crore) was generated by the Indian government from tourism activities in 2015. Besides from these, tourism supported 37.315 million jobs. Different campaign was launched to promote India as a popular tourist destination by the India's ministry of tourism. The phrase "Incredible India" was approved as a slogan by the ministry (TNN, 2005). To persist the rich cultural heritage and diversity of India the Government of India coined the concept of Incredible India. It was an International Marketing Campaign to promote tourism yet an extremely interactive campaign to establish message retention as and when the tourists are making the decisions to visit their favorite international holiday destinations.

'Atithi Devo Bhavah' was another social awareness campaign that aimed at giving a great sense of being welcomed to our country. The campaign targets the general public and mainly focusing stakeholders of the tourism industry. Another initiative was from the Kerala Government to promote tourism on social media. (2013) Apart from just opening the Face book Page it took an initiative to organize two workshops in association with Face book. The workshop was themed as Travel goes social.

Results and Discussions

The advancement through the internet and the development of Social Media has assisted the interconnectivity of travelers through the various means of social media. Interactions through various means of social Media like through forums, ratings, reviews and feedbacks. The development of various means of social media helps the travelers to make better choice and discussion. Travelers rely on personal approach rather than on various advertisements as the social media information that is through their personal acquaintance. The information shared through the social media plays a great role in the pre-stage of travelling.

Conclusion

The study helped in understanding that the social media helps the traveler in making decision and reducing the risk of dissatisfaction as the traveler is pre-assured about the destination through the research done by them at the pre-stage of travelling. As well as there is much scope if more campaigns and marketing is done through the social media. This paper is based on a review of studies conducted on the usage of Social Media by tourism organizations and the effect of Social Media on the traveler's decision. For future research, a qualitative tool can be used to analyze Social Media effects as well as ways to promote tourism. It can be backed up with a quantitative study in the form of questionnaire survey to understand how tourist decision can be effected through various social media platforms.

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