Role of Social Media in Marketing of Tourism Industry

Nazish Mushtaq[1], Asma Wali[2]

[1]Department of Management Studies, University of Kashmir
[2]Department of Management Studies, University of Kashmir

ABSTRACT

Social media are playing an increasingly important role as information resource in tourism both for customers (i.e. the tourists), who gather trustworthy information supporting the choice of destinations and services from peers, and for businesses, which can use the same information for improving their marketing strategies. The use of social media data can also offer new opportunities for decision- support in tourism planning. The power of social media has been increased over the last few years and can be used in tourism marketing to shape customer's purchasing behaviour. While making decisions regarding travel and vacation planning, potential tourists search for information of tourism products and services in order to reduce uncertainty and perceived risks. The aim of the study was to identify the role of social media in marketing of tourism industry and how it influences tourist's travel planning.

Keywords: social media, travel planning, tourist behaviour, tourism

---

1   INTRODUCTION

At the end of 20th century (1997 to 2000) a diffusion between set of hardware and software led to the emergence of new technologies collectively known as the Internet which combines many features of existing media with new capabilities of interactivity and addressability and radically changed most of our economic and social life[1]. In recent years a technological and sociological paradigm shift has taken place in the Internet form first generation web which is composed by static web pages enabling global information sharing but not interactivity and information-centric to second generation web often known as social media which links people and users, and with its user generated content capability it is considered mostly as people-centric.

Social media is gradually gaining more momentum in the business world as it has started replacing traditional source of information. It supports the idea of forming close personal relationships as well as business contacts to dissipate the message rapidly across the globe. Use of social media web sites has increased the channels of communication and its effectiveness in the organization. Now people need not waste their time as it has become easy for a person to send messages through an instant messenger or a tweet and get the response quick. It has also improved collaboration between team members in an organization, which has resulted in a better outcome. They have also discovered that they are able to monitor the market, their competition and their customers via social media outlets. This allows businesses to be on top of any changes that may be needed and to proactively make appropriate adjustments to strategies, products or services.

While tourism industry is an information based and information intensive industry, social media can play an increasingly important role as information resource in tourism. The mechanism of online sharing of information can facilitate tourist industry to make closer relation with potential and current clients [2]. Social media networks can facilitate tourists to gather information supporting the choice of destinations and services as well as businesses, which can use the same information for improving their marketing strategies. The use of social media data can also offer new opportunities for decision-support in tourism planning. Social media supports the pre-travel phase, where all the search and bookings can take place online; the in-travel phase, through interactive forums and/or blogging while on the road; and the post-travel phase where people can share experiences, review hotels and destinations, and post photographs and videos from their trips [3].

2   LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1   Social media

The development of information and communication technologies helped social media to emerge as a powerful medium of communication and connection between people. Social media has amplified the power of consumer-to-

consumer conversations in the marketplace by enabling one person to communicate with literally hundreds or thousands of other consumers quickly and with relatively little effort [4]. Social media is seen as a new way to communicate using various activities that integrate technology, social interactions and construction of words, pictures, videos and audios. It is a real time environment with no location or time constraint built with people's contribution and interaction. This interaction and the manner in which information is presented depend on varied perspectives and building of shared meaning among communities, as people share their stories and experiences [5].

Social media is identified as an online tools, applications and platforms involving peer-to-peer communications enabling interactive web content creation and exchange by the participants. Social media is defined as a group of internet based applications that build on the ideology and technology foundation of web 2.0 and allow the creation and exchange of user generated content [6]. It is noted that there are literally hundreds of different social media platforms (e.g., social networking, text messaging, shared photos, podcasts, streaming videos, wikis, blogs, discussion groups) [7]. The top 10 global websites by late 2010 were: Google, Facebook, YouTube, Yahoo, Windows Live, Baidu.com, Wikipedia, Blogger.com, Twitter, and QQ.com [8]. Facebook is considered most popular networking site that has crossed 1.2 billion members. It continues to dominate as the most used social networking site, being used by 95% of social networking participants. LinkedIn is the next most popular social media platform, being used by 24% of social networking users, with usage highest amongst those that were employed full-time as well as higher income demographics [9]. Businesses today find that social media use is no longer the exception, but rather the rule.

Businesses are using social media in many functional areas and are enjoying numerous tangible benefits such as enhanced brand popularity [10], facilitating word-of-mouth communication [11], increasing sales [12], sharing information in a business context [13] and generating social support for consumers [14],[15]. In addition, the networking of individuals through social media provides shared values, leading to a positive impact on trust [16]. A study by [17] on how Social Media and public relation connects and came to the conclusion that with the emergence of Social Media the whole communications landscape has transformed due to tremendous power of social media networks. They stressed on how social media complements traditional public relation and its existence is important for the successful business. This way business companies and agencies are all undergoing a change and are trying to evolve their strategy, physical structure and business models to be in tune with social media. Another study conducted by [18] reviewed how social media has brought marketing public relation to a new level by connecting marketers with their audience. They suggested that for developing relations with consumers, companies have to show their presence on social media and realise the fact that basic word of mouth principles are even stronger in their online world.

2.2 Social Media and Tourism Industry

The tourism industry has emerged as one of the largest and fastest growing economic sectors globally. It is considered to be the major phenomenon of the modern society and perceived by almost all countries of the world as a potent ingredient in the economic developmental strategies. The increasing changes in tourism sector due to current advances in technologies and tourist' changeable needs forced the sector to design a new framework in tourism destination and marketing strategy [19]. It has seen that internet based technologies has made industry to reconsider the way for planning and consuming tourism products and services. For the promotion of local resources in global perspective tourism marketers need to exploit the tools provided by social media as it is becoming an effective tool in the tourism industry to build brand loyalty, act as online distribution channel, perform service recovery, and build relationships with customers in the community [20].

Social media have opened up a new world of dialogue among people, including conversations about tourism services, trips and destinations, as they facilitate direct interactions between tourism providers and tourists. Most importantly, online reviews are highly important sources of information. From the provider perspective, the information and input generated on social media as online reviews should be seen as opportunities to understand and respond to customers' needs. Online reviews provide information and input for improving the services and the quality of tourist experience. If the tourism providers gather, analyse and manage this information properly, then they can improve the effectiveness of their marketing and management functions. Wang et al [21] discussed a conceptual framework about virtual community and their implications in the travel industry. They pointed out that growth of internet made people more empowered by forming and participating in virtual communities. Anderson [22] introduced the importance of community web-enhancement activities in Relation Marketing and stated that involvement in the web communities can help in reaching out to the wider audience which in turn influences customer's involvement in discussing possible ways for product development and modification which results in brand building.. Chan and Guillet [20] pointed out that several e-marketing strategies have been proposed by industry experts ranging from integration of e marketing plans with different functional areas of the organization, to an ever evolving, dedicated e- marketing division. Furthermore they suggested that with extensive marketing efforts through Facebook, twitter, and other forms of social media, tourism industry could be able to generate potential consumers.

2.3 Social Media and Tourist Behaviour

In the tourism industry social media is considered an important source of tourism information thus having a huge impact on the way people search and share information which further influences their choice for destinations [23],[24]. That is, social media is greatly changing the way how tourists search, find, read, and process information about tourism suppliers and their destinations. Tourists can share their travel stories through social media such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, YouTube, and Trip Advisor.

Potential tourists can rely on others' experiences for their decision-making, due to the experiential nature of tourism products [25]. Social media tools are used throughout the travel planning process and after holidays for experience sharing strongly affecting final decision in holiday plans [26]. Social media would decrease uncertainty and increase the exchange utility on one hand, and provide users by storytelling a sense of belonging into virtual travel communities on the other hand [27], [28]. In the former case, social media may most likely contribute directly to an increasing destination visitation. However, in the latter case, social media might contribute to brand building of tourist destinations in the long run but be less likely to lead an immediate increase in tourist visitation. The decision-making processes of consumers can be affected by their communications and interactions, particularly information and experience sharing, with other consumers in the virtual communities [29]. The authors affirmed that people prefer to obtain different types of information (i.e. informational, relational, and recreational) from various social networks and that social ties have a significant impact on consumer decision processes, including need recognition, actual behaviour, and post-purchase evaluation.

Many potential tourists use social media for their travel plans. They visit relevant social media sites before deciding on the travel due to the fact that they believe the virtual assessment to be useful for their purchasing decision [30]. Gratzel et al [31] who conducted a comprehensive survey on 1480 users of tripadvisor.com to find out the role and impact of online travel reviews in trip planning behavior and revealed that online reviews on travel related consumer reviews and rating websites influence traveller's plans and choices. They found that in the digital era travellers search for travel and accommodation reviews throughout their trip. During pre-travel they try to narrow down their choices and in latter two stages they share their experiences. This was also supported by study conducted by Shankar et al [32] on international students travel experience and their perception of western Austria as tourist destination and found that most of them visit western Austria based on word-of-mouth communication. Another study conducted by Fortis et al [26] on a sample of 346 members of an online panel of internet users from Russia and other Former Soviet Union (FSU) Republics who have been in holiday in the previous 12 months to investigate the role and impact of social media on the travel planning process. They focussed on before, during and after the trip to provide insight on the usage level, scope of using social media, level of influence and trust on social media.. The findings of the study revealed that social media is being used by the travellers during three stages (before, during and after) of travel planning process and at each stage social media is used to different extent and for different purpose. They concluded that travellers mostly used social media during post-trip stage to share their experience photos and videos with friends followed by during the travel stage to stay connected with their friends and loved ones. Furthermore confirmed that 65% of travellers change their original plans as they get influenced by the information they obtain through social media networks. Jacobsen and Munar [33] studied 405 tourists returning from Mallorca to Denmark and Norway to investigate how tourists search information and choose destination in the digital age and confirmed that majority of tourists employ online communication not only for trip planning but also throughout their stay. A study on 123 Romanian young people aged between 20-35 years was carried out to determine the trust users have about the information available through social media for planning their destinations. The results showed that in recent years a change in tourist behaviour is registered as before choosing a destination they use social media channels intensively for acquiring information and consider it reliable and trustworthy [34].

CONCLUSION

In an era of networking, many aspects in social life have changed. People are exposed to abundant information in their daily lives, whether they look for the information or the same flows freely to them. The internet has transformed the experience of tourists when they are planning their travels, when they are travelling and when tourists remember their experiences. Based on the literature review, it can be concluded that social media is an increasingly important source of information in the traveller's decision-making process—with the faceless reviewers who add their comments to these web pages rapidly becoming the travel opinion leaders of the electronic age thus saving their time, money and unwanted stress. The literature review also confirmed that social media is used during all stages of the holiday planning process (before, during and after holidays) however, to a different extent and for a different purpose. Also with the growth of Internet technology, the development of social media tools has led to the introduction of new opportunities for the hospitality companies to improve their competitive edge. Destination managers and other tourism related businesses should design social media communications to encourage tourists to share the nature of their experiences both during and after their visits to the destination.

REFERENCES

[1]   P. Barwise, A. Elberse, and K Hammond, Marketing and the Internet (Handbook of Marketing Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications Inc, 2006).
[2]   D. Buhalis. Strategic use of information technologies in the tourism industry. Tourism management, 19(5), 1998, 409-421.
[3]   J. Chung and D. Buhalis. Web 2.0: A study of online travel community, In O'Connor, P., Hopken, W. &Gretzel, U. (Eds.), Information and Communication Technologies in Tourism 2008: Proceedings of the International Conference in Innsbruck, Austria, 2008 (pp. 70-81). Wien: Springer.
[4]   W. Mangold and D. Faulds. Social media: The new hybrid element of the promotion mix, Business horizons, 52(4), 2009, 357-365.

[5]   T. Gruber. Collective knowledge systems: Where the social web meets the semantic web. Web semantics: science, services and agents on the World Wide Web, 6(1), 2008, 4-13.

[6]   A. Kaplan, and M. Haenlein. Users of the world, unite! The challenges and opportunities of Social Media. Business horizons, 53(1),2010, 59-68.

[7]   R. Harris. Social media ecosystem mapped as a wiring diagram". Retrieved September 27, 2010, from http:// www.twitterthoughts.com/social-media-newsanalyses/2009/9/3/social-media-ecosystem-mapped-as-awiringdiagram.html?printerFriendly=true

[8]   Alexa. Top sites: The top 500 sites on the Web". Retrieved September 2010, from http://www.alexa.com/topsites/ Global.

[9]   Statistic Brain. Social networking statistics. Available online. http://www.statisticbrain.com/social-networking-statistics/2012(Accessed on 13 December 2017.

[10]   NS Tung, V Kamboj, A Bhardwaj, "Unit commitment dynamics-an introduction", International Journal of Computer Science & Information Technology Research Excellence, Volume 2, Issue 1, Pages 70-74, 2012.

[11]   L. Vries, S. Gensler, H. Leeflang. Popularity of brand posts on brand fan pages: an investigation of the effects of social media marketing. Journal of Interactive Marketing, 26(2), 2012, 83-91.

[12]   Y. Chen, S. Fay and Q. Wang. The role of marketing in social media: How online consumer reviews evolve, Journal of Interactive Marketing, 25(2), 2011, 85-94.

[13]   R. Agnihotri, P. Kothandaraman, R. Kashyap, and R. Singh. Bringing "social" into sales: The impact of salespeople's social media use on service behaviors and value creation, Journal of Personal Selling & Sales Management, 32(3), 2012, 333-348.

[14]   H. Lu and K. Hsiao. The influence of extro/introversion on the intention to pay for social networking sites, Information & Management, 47(3), 2010, 150-157.

[15]   H. Ali. Exchanging value within individuals' networks: Social support implications for health marketers, Journal of marketing Management, 27(3-4), 2011, 316-335.

[16]   P. Ballantine and R. Stephenson. Help me, I'm fat! Social support in online weight loss networks, Journal of Consumer Behaviour, 10(6), 2011, 332-337.

[17]   Er Amit Bhardwaj, Amardeep Singh Virdi, RK Sharma, Installation of Automatically Controlled Compensation Banks, International Journal of Enhanced Research in Science Technology & Engineering, 2013.

[18]   J. Wu, Y. Chen and Y. Chung. Trust factors influencing virtual community members: A study of transaction communities, Journal of Business Research, 63(9-10), 2010, 1025-1032.

[19]   N. Eyrich, M. Padman and K. Sweetser. PR practitioners' use of social media tools and communication technology. Public relations review, 34(4), 2008, 412-414.

[20]   H. Pechlaner and P. Tschurtschenthaler. Tourism policy, tourism organisations and change management in Alpine regions and destinations: A European perspective, Current Issues in Tourism, 6(6), 2003, 508-539.

[21]   L. Chan and B. Guillet. Investigation of social media marketing: How does the hotel industry in Hong Kong perform in marketing on social media websites? Journal of Travel & Tourism Marketing, 28(4), 2011, 2011, 345–368.

[22]   Y. Wang and D. Fesenmaier. Modeling Participation in an Online Travel Community, Journal of Travel Research, 42(3), 2011, 261-270.

[23]   P. Andersen. Relationship marketing and brand involvement of professionals through web-enhanced brand communities: The case of Coloplast, Industrial marketing management, 34(3), 2005, 285-297.

[24]   Z. Xiang and U. Gretzel. Role of social media in online travel information search, Tourism management, 31(2), 2010, 179-188.

[25]   B. Zeng and R. Gerritsen. What do we know about social media in tourism? A review, Tourism Management Perspectives, 10, 2014, 27-36.

[26]   S. Litvin, R. Goldsmith and B Pan. (2008). Electronic word-of-mouth in hospitality and tourism management, Tourism management, 29(3), 2008, 458-468.

[27]   J. Fotis, D. Buhalis and N. Rossides. (2011). Social media impact on holiday travel planning: The case of the Russian and the FSU markets. International Journal of Online Marketing (IJOM), 1(4), 2011, 1-19.

[28]   U. Gretzel, D. Fesenmaier, and J. O'leary. The transformation of consumer behaviour. Tourism business frontiers: Consumers, products and industry, 2006, 9-18.

[29]   Y. Wang, Q. Yu and D. Fesenmaier. Defining the virtual tourist community: Implications for tourism marketing, Tourism Management, 23(4), 2002, 407–417.

[30]   K. De Valck, G. Van Bruggen and B. Wierenga. Virtual communities: A marketing perspective. Decision support systems, 47(3), 2009, 185-203.

[31]   M. Sariisik and G Ozbay. Electronic Text Communication and a Literary Review on Application in Tourism Industry, International Management Economics and Business Review, 8 (16), 2012, 1-22

[32]   U. Gretzel, and K. Yoo. (2008). Use and impact of online travel reviews. Information and communication technologies in tourism 2008, 35-46. [34] R. Dina and G. Sabou. Influence of social media in choice of touristic destination. Cactus Tourism Journal, 3(2), 2012, 24-30.

[33]   NS Tung, V Kamboj, B Singh, A Bhardwaj, Switch Mode Power Supply An Introductory approach, Switch Mode Power Supply An Introductory approach, May 2012.

[34]   V. Shankar, G. Urban and F. Sultan. Online trust: a stakeholder perspective, concepts, implications, and future directions, The Journal of strategic information systems, 11(3-4), 2002, 325-344.

[35]   J. Jacobsen and A. Munar. Tourist information search and destination choice in a digital age. Tourism management perspectives, 1, 2012, 39-47.

[36]   R. Dina and G. Sabou. Influence of Social media in Choice of Tourist Destination, Cactus Tourism Journal, 3, 2012, 23-24