THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON THE MARKETING COMMUNICATION IN THE TOURISM AND HOSPITALITY INDUSTRY

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ABSTRACT

In recent times, the impact of social media on marketing communication cannot be overemphasized. Social media has proven to have a significant role both on the demand and supply aspects of marketing communication within the tourism and hospitality industry. This has directly facilitated the interaction and reaction with visitors via various internet platforms as well as provide a platform for the evaluations of services and satisfaction rates. This review study analyses the research publications that focus on the changes in marketing communications after the introduction of social media in tourism. It recapitulates the main characteristics of social media and its implication on marketing communication strategies. Since there is no collection of data, this conceptual paper is based solely on review and analysis of previous research done and data from the literature. The findings of this paper suggest that research on social media in the tourism and hospitality sector is still in its embryonic stage. Additionally, it infers that as part of tourism management and marketing strategy, the need to encourage more in-depth research into the influence and impacts of social media on several facets of the tourism and hospitality industry, becomes highly necessary in this domain.

Keywords: Social Media, Tourism, Hospitality Sector, Marketing Communication, Word-of-Mouth (WOM), Electronic Word-of-Mouth (e-WOM).

JEL Codes: D83, L83, M15, Z32

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1. INTRODUCTION

The tourism industry is regarded as one of the most competitive aspects of the hospitality sector which demands active management of natural, financial and human resources. Studies have revealed that several instruments have been used to drive the marketing phase in the tourism industry to achieve customer satisfaction and loathly such as the social media platform (Jashi, 2013). This implies that it is essential to provide appropriate infrastructure, increase service quality and customer satisfaction in order to develop the tourism industry of any country. However, recent technological advancements in internet applications have changed the frontiers of website designs towards more interactive, and user friendly social media, which enhances the importance of social media to several stakeholders (Kapoor et al., 2018). Thus, as more hotels integrated social media into their marketing communications, and advertisement (Mackenzie et al., 1986), the attention on its effectiveness increases. While social media are known to be effective in enhancing marketing practices, there has been limited quantitative support to reinforce these claims (Leung et al., 2015). Similarly, very few studies have examined the effectiveness of social media promotions in the academic world and this has been one of the most challenging questions yet to be resolved by marketers in the industry (Leung et al., 2015; Mabry & Porter, 2010; Odhiambo & Adhiambo, 2012).

Research evidences suggests that Facebook and Twitter have been indispensable in recent times, as more companies have adopted these platforms for their social media marketing (Husain et al., 2016; Kim & Ko, 2010). The research paper is under the title 'The changes in marketing communication after the introduction of social media' the basic emphasis will therefore discuss the changes that took place between the eras to understand this dynamic change and to what extent it changed the map of the tourism and hospitality industry today. Despite the fact that marketing and e-commerce now require a deployment of different resources and specialists in information technology, the information technology industry now dominates a decent percentage of revenue and market share today (Mamaghani, 2009).

From a tourism perspective, the present research will discuss how social media have removed the barriers of culture and languages between different communities, opening the door for the hospitality industry to cater a diverse audience. The findings of this research will give a clear image of the changes in marketing tactics and the impact of its results. It will also include the advancements in the tourism industry today due to e-marketing. The findings and conclusions will attempt to grasp the impact of this change and highlight most factors that played a role in it. The review will therefore include researches based on social media statistics and its major trends over time.

1.1 The Purpose of Study

Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and Instagram are the best known and effective social media networks for marketing in the tourism and hospitality industry. The usage and impact of social media marketing strategies are very crucial for satisfying tourist demand in the global world. Therefore, this paper seeks to provide insights into social media in the tourism industry from the perspectives of marketing communication and evaluating their effectiveness in the tourism marketing management. Hence, a clear understanding of why and how the social media function is vital to tourism marketing communication is discussed in this study. To this effect this research answers the following question.

- How does the application of social media in tourism affect marketing communication?

The objective of the research is to uncover the implications of media marketing communication in the hospitality industry through the use of social media as a major tool.

2. METHODOLOGY

This conceptual paper is based solely on review and analysis of previous research done and data from the literature. Different methods were used to collect and evaluate the literature. Firstly, we searched for the key terms such as social media, marketing communications, and other terms related to the subject topic on Google. Through the use of Google Scholar and other database, including ScienceDirect, JSTOR, Sage publications, relevant literatures on the topic under investigation were reviewed from articles and journals. The criteria for articles included in this study was that all papers must have adequate discussions and data related to the following key words: Social media, tourism, and hospitality sector as well as marketing communication, and social media marketing.

3. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND AND LITERATUR DEVELOPMENT

3.1 Background

Back in the 90s marketing was not entirely about communication and getting the message across, it was more about awareness, about the products business had to offer and how it could cater to different needs of a customer. The most commonly used methods of marketing were therefore billboards, TV, radios and paper advertisement, however, there was something that stood more important than everything else interpersonal communication (Mulhern, 2013). In 1990 the web was introduced based on which the websites could now be accessed with the "www" domain that is now the most important symbol of the internet, following in 1995 new programming languages were introduced as a means to the invention of better web development and it networking. However, the trends changed to a certain extent, leaving internet to play its role for advertisement (Batra & Keller, 2016). In 1998 something amazing was created in the world of technology known as GOOGLE, the search engine deployed all its

resources to gather data from different sources, making secondary data readily available for the marketers to gather anything they need to reach out all potential clients. As a result of this brand like Microsoft and apple grew and introduced better products reducing silos and paper use. People started specializing in the field of IT and graduates had to be computer literates in the coming years, to get better jobs or start their own businesses. Later in 2007/8 android phone were introduced enabling all users to be perfectly mobile, this was taken as another opportunity for businessmen and software's like whatsapp were introduced. With the passage of time not only the number of users grew with IT literacy and supporting products, but also the awareness for softwares and hardwares and products grew. Facebook purchased whastapp does approximately $19 million and has its own revenue around $12.5 billion that most of the manufacturers fail to achieve (See figure 1.0). Today Facebook is used by almost a billion users (Ladkin & Buhalis, 2016; Kwok & Yu, 2013).
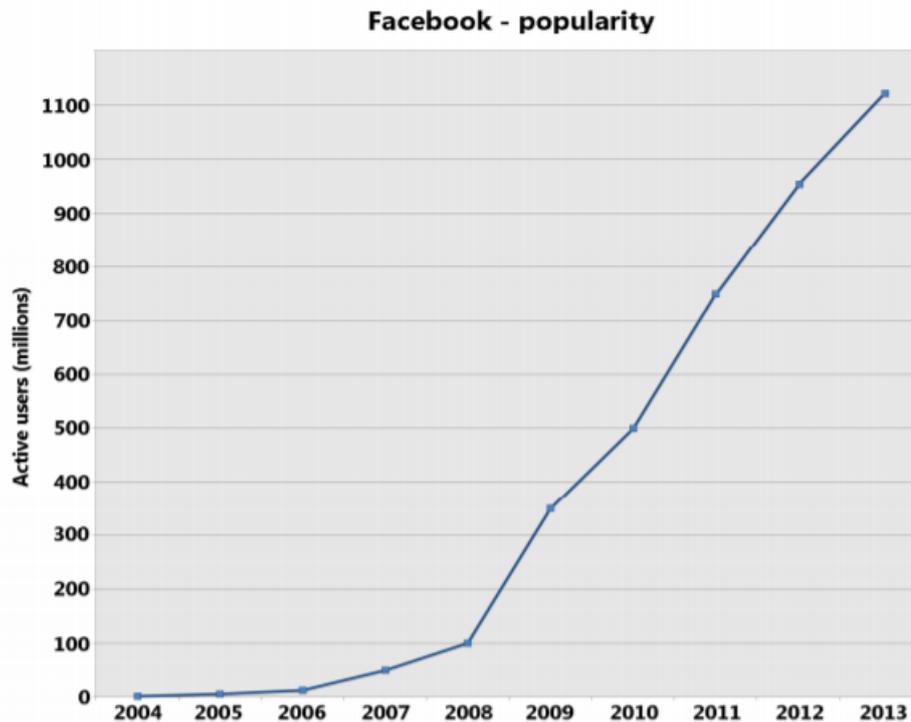

Figure 1.0: Facebook Active Users in millions vs Years from 2004-2013 (Sources: VijayaChandra et al., 2015).

The most useful tool for the marketing companies on a professional platform was yet to come known as LinkedIn. With 396 million users and registered companies from all over the world are connected to this platform. All people can be searched and approached no matter which location they are in today (Hudson & Thal, 2013). As we can see the trend initially was coming towards the creation of web profiles and representations as the organizations were able to transform this change made a fortune out of it. Statistics suggest that emails and messages are the most widely used tactic of market

today due to its reliability in terms of saving time. The chain of command and hierarchy, however, have changed as well; marketing at an interpersonal level is done only by managers at the top levels of the company whereas executives at the lower level use e-commerce and digital marketing tactics to reach out to a bigger audience. To draw a comparison, we can simply add the number of users on all social platforms and gauge the difference between marketing back then and now, today as per stats more than $400 billion is spent all over the world on an annual basis one marketing, which includes videos, images, emails, web portals, online banners and researches (Shirky, 2011; Kim & Ko, 2012). The most important factor that plays a vital role is the habits of consumers that can be traced by companies by following their search cookies. This is an advancement trend which hotel and hospitality now enjoy in global scale. Tourism searches are probably the most important data for hotel industries, and they can follow the patterns and advertise their work accordingly (Ayeh et al., 2012; Leung et al.,2013).

This rapid growth of social media platforms has changed the dynamics of consumer interaction, both with businesses and among themselves, with the emergence of the phenomenon known as social media and its warp speed growth, business strategies, tactics, and instruments for communicating with customers and other stakeholders have been transformed significantly (Minazzi, 2015). Thus, the way we do business and how businesses attract and retain consumers ultimately changes. A study showed that social media channels were commonly used by U.S. businesses to connect with their customers or prospects than Google (Anon, 2018). Seventy percent (70%) of businesses uses Facebook followed by 46% using Twitter, 37% using LinkedIn, and 25% using YouTube. Facebook and Twitter were the top two social media tools used by marketers for the past 2 years. In the hotel industry, about 75% of hotels have used social media for marketing purposes. Facebook and Twitter were also found to be the two most useful social media channels for marketing purposes in the hospitality industry (Leung & Bai, 2013).

Studies have shown that traditional Integrated Marketing Communications (IMC) tools have made a significant breakthrough in the social media adverts within the hospitality industry (Mangold & Fauld, 2009) as seen in figure 2.0. Traditional media include broadcast channels including television, radio and cinema, newspaper, magazine and public advertising such as billboards and sign posts. The hospitality industry spends approximately 70% of its advertising expenditure on Tv, radio and print, which has remained the largest media for its advertisement (Mehta, 2017). Similarly, social media research has received increased attention from tourism scholars of various disciplines towards understanding the significances of tourists' behavior, decision making and corporate communication (Minazzi, 2015). Although in recent times, numerous firms in the tourism sector have caught up with the social media movements, the industry is yet to completely exploit the potential of this emerging data

and communication resource especially toward the potential of customer engagement (Noone et al., 2011).

Figure 2.0: Elements of Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) (Sources: Anzeigen, 2015).

3.2 Literature Development

There are many interesting researches when it comes down to the impact of electronic marketing in this era. In a comprehensive study connecting marketing communication and corporate brands by Spotts & Weinberger (2008), elaborated how publicity and advertisement volumes are important in order to get maximum results in marketing. It was also emphasized after taking data sets from five different industries that stronger brands can use a uniformed strategy of marketing, whereas weaker brands usually prefer a mix of strategy (Kim et al., 2012). This shows how important technology in terms of increasing the quantity of audience that is being targeted.

As a complement to the study mentioned above, Šerić et al. (2015) specified the importance of online integrated marketing communication in terms of hospitality and tourism which is the another important factor in our research. Although the research is based on the data collected through surveys from guests and employees in Croatia and Italy, but supports a holistic vision of marketing that can be applied more effectively with the technological advances. Hence, supports the concept of social media marketing. Similarly, another sophisticated research by Buhalis & Law (2008), the Bournemouth and Hong Kong Universities discussed the significance of internet marketing in terms of tourism. Based on information taken from secondary research the paper focuses on how the internet has a larger impact on infrastructure of communication with all stakeholders. It also mentioned how internet supports

innovation and competitiveness removing geographic and cultural barriers. Arnott & Bridgewater (2002), in another research argued that the internet has taken marketing to another level, where businesses on an international scale have been benefited to a great extent. The data were collected from corporate sources of e-commerce. Pires et al. (2006) highlighted the role of marketing in the modern era and how it empowered the customers with more choices. Due to increased marketing over the internet, consumers are now aware of the choices they have and can make. Lindridge et al. (2013) gathered data based on several marketing communication sources, social media marketing have a significant behavioral change. The research brings forth the idea that internet marketing overcomes any environmental factors that can hinder its effects. Moreover, a research conducted by the University of Copenhagen, Jansen (2008) concluded that online marketing can cater a bigger audience and hence ensuring more sales in lesser consumption of time and resources. For this research, advertisement data was taken from several industries. On the contrary Miles (2013) thinks otherwise, based on the research in London the argument presents a case of lack of dialogue and interpersonal role due to the introduction of online marketing based on which the clients can lose confidence. A similar work by Danaher & Rossiter (2011), drew a conclusion that the effectiveness of marketing is subjective to the target audience it caters. For the younger and tech savvy generation internet might just do the trick, whereas older people still prefer TVs, radios and newspapers as dependable sources of advertisement.

This research will encompass a rough estimate of audience and the overall change that all industries faced, especially the tourism industry. Another interesting part of the research includes the information technology industry and how this industry developed over time. The research is therefore compliment to (Spotts et al., 2010; Arnott & Bridgewater, 2002; Pires, 2006; Lindridge et al., 2013; Jansen, 2008; and Šerić et al., 2015) which mainly focuses on the importance of mass online marketing for all industries. These researches introduce some more advantages of internet marketing such as consumer sovereignty, elimination of environmental factors and better networking of stakeholders. From tourism perspective, the research supports the idea of Bualais & Law (2008) which again an argument is supporting the use of internet marketing techniques to get clients beyond geographic borders. On the other end, Miles (2013) argues otherwise, as it focuses on the interpersonal skills of marketing rather mass audience targeting showing the downside of the use of technology for marketing today.

3.3. The Influence of Word-of-Mouth (WOM) and Electronic Word-of-Mouth (e-WOM) on Social Media Marketing

Several studies have suggested that social media websites are considered as appropriate platforms for word-of-mouth (WOM) (Kim et al., 2014; Erkan & Evans, 2014). According to Sohn

(2014), social media expedite the spreading of electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) across a larger population. Therefore, to meet the challenges of modern society, marketing experts should recognize the benefits of the concept of electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM) (Lončarić & Ribarić, 2016). Additionally, Chu & Kim (2011) posits that eWOM allow a flexible option for users to share their thoughts by only forwarding the posts they agree with, thus making them selective in presenting positive information about themselves in networking sites. As defined by Arndt (1967), the WOM, as an oral form of interpersonal non-commercial communication among acquaintances. This concept has since evolved into a new form of communication known as eWOM. According to Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004), the eWOM refers to as any statement made by potential, actual, and former customers about a company's product and services through the Internet. Additionally, Goodman (2009) reiterates that technological advancements foregrounds eWOM and increases its applicability in marketing. WOM has evolved from the 'organic interconsumer influence model', where WOM influence occurs at a one-on-one basis between two consumers without any interference from marketers, to 'the network co-production model' where WOM is directly driven by marketers with the active co-production from virtual consumer networks (Kozinets et al., 2010). WOM influence has been suggested to be stronger in networks that are firmly connected than those that are larger in size (Katona et al., 2011). However, studies ague that engaging in social media platforms including Facebook and Twitter allows users to network with people from strong ties as well as those from weak ones (Wilcox & Stephen, 2013).

e-WOM has become a pervasive and influential source of product information the emergence of online social media (Thoumrungroje, 2014). In this view, several study findings are of the opinion that the tourism industry is strongly affected by e-WOM, and hotels are perhaps the most vulnerable to the pros and cons of this marketing tool. Conversely, the customer-leveraging possibilities offered by the internet, which referred to as electronic referral marketing (ERM) has become an interesting diection to explore. The ERM brings to the fore a system which uses the consumer-to-consumer communications, as opposed to company-to-consumer communications, to circulate information about a product or service, hence leading to its rapid and cost effective market adoption (Brodin, 2000; Krishnamurthy 2001; De Bruyn & Lilien, 2004). Marketing communications must be targeted to defined audiences largely because of the information-rich nature of contemporary society. This implies that consumers are both overwhelmed with social media and marketing communications and extremely aware of their own conscious ability to screen out unwanted or irrelevant information. Therefore, consumers are likely to react strongly against service providers that do not understand their needs or interests, and in any case the cost of delivering broad-scale information to non-target audiences is likely to be prohibitive to most organizations (Sozinova & Fokina, 2015; McCabe, 2009).

4. DISCUSSION

The global economy is currently experiencing a paradigm shift with the exponential growth of the internet and other information communication technologies. At this speed of technological advancement, social media will progressively impact many economic and social aspects of the tourism and hospitality industry. These changes will be experienced in various ways, including travelers and tourists destination search, as well as collaboratively production and information dissemination about hospitality related issues. Furthermore, studies have revealed that social media has also changed the business models and operations, customer service, marketing and promotional processes as well as services development, marketing and networking (Zeng & Gerritsen, 2014), offers a medium for tourists to express their desires and requirements (Leung & Bai, 2013), and gives tourism providers a tool to acquire customer feedback (Öz, 2015). As suggested by Leung et al. (2013), supplier-related studies have recently paid more attention to marketing and management.

This study presents a broad perspective of the researches on social media use in tourism, and highlights the extent to which tourists and practitioners use social media in tourism participation. It suggests that in recent years, all major publication sources have published related researches contributed by a large number of researchers around the world. Although the research on social media in tourism has been increasingly broadening and deepening its interests, research on social media in tourism is still in its infancy. However, the growth of social media used in tourism, related studies in this domain seem to lack publications which broadens this topic, or the coverage of research within most regions. This gap ultimately informed the need for this study. Hence, this research aims to contribute to the academia and industry by identifying some research voids in extant studies and providing an agenda for future research.

5. CONCLUSION

The research shows that marketers can now cater to a vast majority of their audience when it comes to advertisement at very low cost. Statistics show that businesses can now cater more than 1100 million users from all over the globe with reduced costs and better analysis (Albers-Miller & Gelb, 1996). The use of this research is however very interesting for hotels and tourism industry as it shows that managers should now focus on the technical wing of marketing employees and can follow the search trends of people in terms of not only the countries they visit but also the services they are looking for. Another factor they should now focus upon is the ambiguity people have related to different cultures that can now be clarified by connected to mass audience (Napoli, 2010). What we can clearly observe today is the openness to experience that people want to experience due to this change today, for example; people are open to foreign foods and environments for living understanding the cultural differences. A

large scale hotel today experiences 4% annual increase in revenue with increased awareness of travelling and the revenue usually tops in billions of dollars (Deloitte, 2016). Lastly the stats also show how the hardware and software information technology industries have grown over time and become giants in terms of revenue, this will assist people who are planning to start their own businesses as this industry has revolutionized the concept of marketing over decades and still is continuing to do so (Law & Jogaratnam, 2005).

Conclusively, the marketing communications landscape has changed drastically over the years due to the new media development which has empowered consumers and changed the way companies/organizations communicate. However, this has given companies in emerging markets somewhat another strategy to enhance their marketing approach by modifying Western cultural practices in combination with the potential of social media and even traditional marketing practices. The emerging markets, consumers, companies and social media are contemporary trends that should be regularly monitored by marketers and researchers because they are areas of opportunities for companies may it be multinationals or national/ local businesses.

6. FUTURE RESEARCH RECOMMENDATIONS

This study recommends that future research should consider other comparative studies for investigating the model explored in this research, to include various national contexts so that generalizability can be attained. This will provide a wider prospect for a more consolidated further theoretical development in on the impact of social media on marketing communication. Beside the many advantages that come with advancements in information communication technologies and its advantages on social media marketing communication, it is also important that future studies should look into the challenge of privacy and information reliability.

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