



Factors influencing the preference and non-preference of digital media by travel agents

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Abstract

Digital media has become an essential tool for the successful information dissemination and publicity of a piece of information intended to be promoted in public. This paper analyses the usage and preference of digital media in promoting tourism products by travel agents or tour operator. The results of our study suggest that consumers are engaged in social networks for tourism trips and sharing the travel experience is one of the most important factors that influence the success of tourism promotion. The factors in our study have been identified through the literature review and the expert opinion. The experts chosen for the study are tourism operators in Bangalore, Karnataka. We use Interpretative structural modeling to analyze the interrelationship between the factors. This study results indicates, tourist destination is the most key influencing factors for tourism promotion in digital media.

Keywords: digital media, destination, tourism operators, travelers

Introduction

The use of Internet and other information communication technologies leads to a new era of tourism economy. Digital media, as one of most powerful online networking tools, has been integrated into a part of social and economic life in the real world. Digital media has emerged as the new way in which people connect socially, by integrating information and communication technology (such as mobile and web-based technologies), social interaction, and the construction of words, pictures, videos and audio. It is actually more than a new way to communicate, but refers to an entire online environment built on people's contributions and interaction.

Digital media has fundamentally changed the way that many companies communicate with and market to their target demographics. For the travel and hospitality sector, in particular, the rise of the Internet and the increased popularity of social channels has altered travel marketing. From the way that traveler's research potential destinations to the activities that they participate in once they arrive, the new ways that consumers use social media to make purchasing decisions has influenced tourism marketing from start to finish. Here are five ways tourism has been impacted.

Travel research transformed: The most profound effect that digital media has had on the tourism industry to date is the democratization of online reviews. Today's travelers go online to research their future travel destinations and accommodations.

Rise in social sharing: People have always loved sharing photos and videos taken of their travels. What social media has done is to facilitate and expand people's ability to share travel experiences with a wider audience than ever before.

Enhanced customer service: Customer service and satisfaction have also been transformed as a result of social

media. The vast majority of brands have a social media presence that is being used to become aware of and, when necessary, to provide help to unsatisfied or confused customers. The companies that respond to complaints in a sincere and genuine manner develop a strong reputation among current and potential customers.

Reshaping travel agencies: Digital media has also had a major impact on the travel agency model. The availability of information and ease of self-service booking have forced travel agencies to adapt from a brick-and-mortar model to a more digital one.

Changing loyalty programs: As most marketers know, acquiring new customers is far more expensive than retaining existing ones. Loyalty programs have become a core piece of the travel business model, and social media has had a massive impact on how hotel loyalty programs are constructed. Many customers understand that the opinions that they share with their individual networks have tremendous influence. As a result, these guests feel entitled to compensation for the positive word-of-mouth marketing that they are doing for a brand.

Review of Literature

Literature to be reviewed encompasses all the material available in this field of study. For this study various sources such as books, articles, journals, research papers, e-resources, newspapers and magazines were reviewed.

Hahn *et al.*, (2014) made an empirical research to inspect the customers intention to use tourism applications in the Smartphones. Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) was used for the purpose of measuring the objective and the data was collected from app users. Data analysis for the study was made using Structural Equation Modelling using a software package called AMOS. Their study highlighted that,

Smartphone users in the age group between 25 to 39 holding a bachelor's degree and falling in the middle-income group use tourism apps to a larger extent. Second it was found that, perceived cost saving acted as a strong factor that influences usage intention of tourism app. Further, Perceived ease of use was found to have little direct influence on Intention to use tourism app. The other finding of the study revealed that, perceived usefulness further increases behavioral intention.

Madlberger, (2014) made a study to investigate the antecedents of consumers towards booking of trips through online websites of travel agencies. TAM model was used in the study for which the data has been collected from 292 consumers through online. The collected data were analyzed through Partial Least Square (PLS) method using Smart PLS developed by Ringle *et al.* (2005). Reliability checks such as Cronbach alpha and Composite reliability were made and also the validity checks for the instrument were carried out. The outcome of the study highlighted that, Perceived ease of use had a significant impact on Perceived Usefulness. Further findings showed that, Perceived usefulness had a significant positive impact on Intention to book trips online.

Abdullah *et al.* (2017) ^[1] made a research to find the reason behind trust of consumers towards online travel websites and also the drivers and outcomes of consumer trust towards online travel websites. Technology Acceptance model was used for the purpose of measuring the objective and the data was collected from Supreme Council of Universities Database from Egypt. Through probability sampling method, the respondents were selected randomly and 1431 valid response were obtained. The conceptual framework of the study was tested using PLS approach and was found that, Perceived ease of use, perceived usefulness, website reputation and website quality were found to be a key indicator for building website trust. Further, it was found that, perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use are important antecedents to form website trust.

Cao *et al.* (2017) ^[4] analyzed the effect of social media on tourism adoption intention. The questionnaire developed for the study was issued to 1100 residents from China who were using social media for tourism related products. The respondents were selected using simple random sampling method and out of the obtained responses, 999 responses were valid. It was found that, tourism consumers use Instagram to a larger extent among the various social media. The other findings stated that, tourism consumers use internet word of mouth for tourism planning and schedule. Moreover, tourism consumers with higher educational qualification pay more attention to social media for connectivity and sharing.

Objectives of the study

- To find the Usage of digital media in Promoting Tourism Product by Travel Agents.
- To identify the preference of digital media among travel agency across Bangalore.
- To know the Reason for non-preference of Digital Media

Research Methodology

Primary Data for the study was obtained through

questionnaires and interviews, wherein, travel agents/tour operators were elicited. Secondary Data was obtained from books, research papers, magazines, journals, newspapers, e-resources.

Scope of the Study

The respondents selected were all the Travel Agent/Tour Operators across Bangalore. This study focused on the analysis of the factors influencing the Preference and Non-Preference of Digital Media in tourism promotion. The study attempted to elicit suggestions to enhance digital media.

Sample Size

A sample of 72 respondents across Bangalore was taken as a representative for conducting the study. Data was collected by the use of a questionnaire through personal interviews and mail.

Plan of Analysis

The primary data collected from respondents was evaluated by using statistical tools such as Cronbach's Alpha, Analysis of demographic variables (age, gender, and residential location), t-test, Mean, Standard Deviation and Anova.

Analysis & Discussion

Table 1: Demographic Profile

		Count	Column N %
Gender	Male	39	54.17%
	Female	33	45.83%
Years of Establishment	<1 Year	9	12.9%
	1-5 Years	23	32.3%
	5-10 Years	19	25.8%
	10-15 Years	16	22.6%
	>15 Years	5	6.5%
Type of Tour Operator	Inbound Tour Operator	14	19.4%
	Outbound Tour Operator	26	35.5%
	Domestic Tour Operator	26	35.5%
	Others	7	9.7%
Form of Travel Agency	Proprietorship	21	29.0%
	Partnership	23	32.3%
	Corporate	14	19.4%
	Others	14	19.4%

The table above refers to the demographic profile of the respondents. It was found that, 54.17 percent of the respondents were male and 45.83 percent of the respondents were female. With regard to the year of establishment, 32.3 percent of the respondents stated that, their travel agency/organization was in the range between 1-5 years followed by 5- 10 years (25.8%), 10-15 years (22.6%), Less than 1 year (12.9%) and more than 15 years (6.5%). It was also found that, 35.5 percent of the respondents were outbound and domestic tour operators, 19.4 percent were inbound tour operators and 9.7 percent were in the other category. While looking into the form of travel agency, 32.3 percent are partnership firms, 29 percentage are proprietorship firms and 19.4 percent are in the Corporate and other category.

Table 2: Usage and Preference towards Digital Media for Promoting Tourism Products/Services

Digital Media for Promoting tourism products/Services	Yes	70	96.8%
	No	2	3.2%
Preference of using Digital Media for promoting tourism products/Services	Yes	58	80.6%
	No	14	19.4%

The simple percentage table above represents the usage and preference towards digital media for promoting tourism products/services by the travel agents. It is observed that, 96.8 percent of the are using digital media for promoting tourism products/services and 80.6 percent of the respondents prefer to use digital media for promotion purpose.

Table 3: Reasons for not Preferring Digital Media for Promoting Tourism Products/services

	Mean	Std. Deviation
Competitors intentionally make fake comments in order to spoil the reputation of others	4.000	1.1986
Digital media can spread false information quickly	3.833	1.2594
Digital Media can easily ruin a business reputation	4.167	1.1077
Digital media can be possibly abused by the tourists and employees in exposing an employer’s trade secrets or business proprietary information	3.667	1.4266
Digital media can lead to unfair negativity, inaccurate information and undue criticism	3.833	1.3947
Others	3.333	1.2946

The above table infers to the reason stated by the travel agency/organizations for not preferring digital media in promoting the tourism product/services. It was found that, the major reason stated by the respondents was Digital media can easily ruin a business reputation ($M = 4.167, S. D = 1.1077$) followed by Competitors intentionally make fake comments in order to spoil the reputation of others ($M = 4.000, S. D = 1.1986$), Digital media can spread false information quickly ($M = 3.833, S. D = 1.2594$), Digital media can lead to unfair negativity, inaccurate information and undue criticism ($M = 3.833, S. D = 1.3947$), Digital media can be possibly abused by the tourists and employees in exposing an employer’s trade secrets or business proprietary information ($M = 3.667, S. D = 1.4266$) and Others ($M = 3.333, S. D = 1.2946$).

Table 4: Descriptive Statistics- Reasons for Preferring Digital Media for Promoting Tourism Products/Services

	Mean	Std. Deviation
My competitors use it	3.840	.8877
I can satisfy my customer needs better	4.320	.6199
I can reach more customers	4.560	.5763
It supplements use of traditional media	4.200	.6380
Helps me to disseminate quality information faster	4.320	.5132
I can reach global audience through social media	4.160	.8877
I can advertise my Products/services efficiently	4.360	.7484
Helps me to retain customers and create loyalty	4.400	.6380
Helps me to know the preference of customers	3.840	1.1653
I could able to get customers with best deal	4.160	.7374

The descriptive table on the reasons stated by the travel agency for preferring digital media in promoting tourism related products/service shows that, the item I can reach more customers ($M=4.56, S. D= 0.576$) had the highest mean value followed by Helps me to retain customers and create loyalty ($M=4.40, S. D= 0.638$), I can advertise my Products/services efficiently ($M=4.36, S. D= 0.748$), Helps me to disseminate quality information faster ($M=4.32, S. D= 0.5132$), I can satisfy my customer needs better ($M=4.32, S. D= 0.6199$), It supplements use of traditional media ($M=4.20, S. D= 0.630$), I could able to get customers with best deal ($M=4.16, S. D= 0.7374$), I can reach global audience through social media ($M=4.160, S. D= 0.8877$), My

competitors use it ($M=3.840, S. D= 0.8877$) and Helps me to Know the preference of customers ($M=3.84, S. D= 1.165$).

Table 5: Type of Digital Media used for promoting the Tourism Product/Service

		Count	Column N %
Social Media	No	7	12.0%
	Yes	51	88.0%
E-mail	No	5	8.0%
	Yes	53	92.0%
Search Marketing (Search Engine Optimization)	No	19	32.0%
	Yes	39	68.0%
Company Websites	No	7	12.0%
	Yes	51	88.0%
Mobile Marketing	No	26	44.0%
	Yes	32	56.0%
Others	No	28	48.0%
	Yes	30	52.0%

With regard to the type of digital media used by the travel agents for promoting the tourism product/service, it was found that, 92 percent of the respondents use E-mail, 88 percent of the respondents use Social Media and Company Websites, 68 percent use Search marketing (Search Engine Optimization), 56 percent use Mobile Marketing and 52 percent stated that they use other type of digital media for promoting tourism products/services.

Discussion

The findings above indicate that more respondents are outbound and domestic tour operators. Among travel agents/tour operators majority of them fall under 5-10 years of establishment. It is observed that the majority of them are using digital media for promoting tourism products/services.

Conclusion

Digital media continues to grow. It increasingly influences on many social and economic aspects. The booming impact of Digital Marketing for Travel Industry is the prime reason why tourism and hospitality companies are having an edge over other industries. The industries are adapting digital marketing strategies is that they carefully analyze how people interact with surrounding environments while traveling. This helps

them recognize the existing user needs and give travelers what they want in order to create the 'waah' effect resultantly ensure repeat sales

Recommendation

The study yields many implications for both practice and literature on the promotion of tourism. The study explored the influence of digital media in promoting tourism. Following the results of this research effort, it is recommended that tourism marketing bodies and tourism companies must break communication barriers and increase their efficiency in promoting tourism activities by increasing the utilization of the digital media platform in their ongoing efforts to showcase the City and the Country at large as tourist destinations of choice. According to Kaplan and Haenlein 101 (2010: 62) the higher level of efficiency available in using social media compared to traditional communication channels prompted tourism industry leaders to state that tourism companies, like any other company, must participate on Twitter, Facebook, MySpace, and other social media sites in order to succeed in today's technological and business environment.

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