International Journal of Applied Social Science
Volume 6 (2), February (2019) : 470-476
Received : 28.12.2018; Revised : 14.01.2019; Accepted : 28.01.2019

RESEARCH ARTICLE
ISSN : 2394-1405 (Print)

Social Media: An Emerging Medium of Advertising in Tourism Industry with Special Reference to Uttar Pradesh

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ABSTRACT

Tourism is a very significant industry of the world economy and has a great contribution to economic development. Advertising in tourism is very critical and different from other types of advertising mainly because the product is usually a service. Earlier, television and radio advertisements captured the attention of millions of consumers and were very popular media of advertising but today, businesses are turning to the Internet, where web searching and social networking is dominating the way consumers are researching and looking for products and services. Tourism is in a fairly promising stage in Uttar Pradesh and has its most significant economic impact on foreign exchange earnings and the generation of Government revenue. However, it appears that there is great potential for increasing further its economic importance through proper advertising. This paper attempts to examine the emerging position of the social media as an advertising medium and its role in the tourism industry of Uttar Pradesh. It was observed that social media has a huge impact on tourists and the way service providers have been reaching consumers. Social media platforms are to a great extent responsible in influencing the decisions of the tourists.

Key Words : Advertising, Social Media, Tourism Industry, Communication, Consumers

INTRODUCTION

Tourism is a very important industry of the world economy and has a great contribution to economic development. Since tourism is a service, the product is 'intangible' (there is nothing tangible for tourists to test in advance), 'inseparable' (services cannot be separated from their production), 'variable' (the experience is variable and subject to multiple factors) and 'perishable' (tourism product is perishable and can not be stored for future sale), advertising has a vital role. People buy holidays on the basis of certain expectations created by advertisers through words, pictures, sounds, etc. Thus, advertising constructs tourism experiences in the imagination and makes an intangible product tangible, using emotions and experiences. Many tourists do not know what to expect. Advertising offers them physical representations of the tourism product.

Tourism Advertising:

Tourism advertising is different from other types of advertising mainly because the products are usually services, that is why advertising is crucial in tourism. Tourists can not try or experience tourism products before hand, tourism products are intangible, and they are only in the mind through the image created by the promoters. Therefore, scholars say that "tourism marketing is about the selling of dreams and that tourism itself is about illusion or about the creation of 'atmosphere" (Morgan, Pritchard, 2001).

Social Media:

Social media is still thought of as a relatively new concept in online marketing but its value has been more and more researched and evaluated in recent years. The way companies communicate with their local communities has gone through a dramatic change in the last few years.

How to cite this Article: Chatterjee, Ranjanabh and Das, Alka (2019). Social Media: An Emerging Medium of Advertising in Tourism Industry with Special Reference to Uttar Pradesh. *Internat. J. Appl. Soc. Sci.,* **6** (2) : 470-476.

The reason for this is a tremendous increase in the use of social media from both companies and from potential buyers of products and services. Over the past few years, we have witnessed the rising of Web 2.0 technologies, as well as a big development in the ways organizations are using them.

Social media maybe described as a group of new kinds of online media, which share the following characteristics:

Participation:

Social media encourages contributions and feedback from everyone who is interested. It blurs the line between media and audience.

Openness:

Most social media services are open to feedback and participation. They encourage voting, comments and the sharing of information. There are rarely any barriers to accessing and making use of content – password-protected content is frowned on.

Conversation:

Whereas traditional media is about "broadcast" (content transmitted or distributed to an audience) social media is better seen as a two-way conversation.

Community:

Social media allows communities to form quickly and communicate effectively. Communities share common interests, such as a love of photography, a political issue or a favorite TV show.

Connectedness:

Most kinds of social media thrive on their connectedness, making use of links to other sites, resources and people.

Forms of Social Media :

Universal McCann (2008) proposes ten important platforms of social media, – Fig. 1 – which encourage users and travellers to post and share their travel experiences, comments, opinions to serve as a source of information for other users (Xiang and Gretzel, 2009, Universal McCann, 2008). There are hundreds of platforms where Internet users can interact and share information with other users, starting from blogs, forums, wikis, video and photo sharing to social networks, virtual communities, chat rooms and pod-cast (Universal McCann, 2008).

Source: Universal McCann 2008

Fig. 1: Key social media platforms

Even though social media is becoming more and more significant all over the world there is still no established definition in the academic literature and it can be interpreted in many ways as we can find in the article written by Fotis *et al.* (2012): social media regularly identify as social software, social web sites, consumer-generated media, user-generated media, user-generated content websites, or even Web 2.0. Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) defined social media as: social media is "a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content" (videos, photos, texts etc.). "Web 2.0 has made available some technologies that… offer new and more efficient ways of communication by enabling users to make their ideas and opinions available to a potential audience of millions of people. This information is called User Generated Content" (Chaves *et al.,* 2012).

Objectives:

This research paper is in fact an outcome of a broader study conducted by the researcher. The objectives of the present research paper are as follows:

1. To analyze the use of social media as an advertising medium for tourism industry in Uttar Pradesh.
2. To examine the role of social media in the promotion of tourism industry in Uttar Pradesh.
3. To investigate the influence of social media on the decision making process of the consumers while selecting tourist destinations and accommodations.

Review of Literature:

Over the years the concept marketing has experienced impressive growth, becoming a scientific discipline with consistent development. As a result of the marketing deepening and specialization trend, tourism marketing arises as part of services marketing. Like many other fields in this case too, practice came before theory, since the services providing companies already applied various differentiated marketing approach.

The recent developments in technology have made it possible for one person to communicate with hundreds or even thousands of others using social media, about products and the companies that provide them. The impact of consumer-to- consumer communications has greatly expanded in the marketplace where consumers share their views.

Social Media is a revolutionary trend that stems from the concepts of Web 2.0 and User Generated Content (UGC). Web 2.0 evolved in 2004 from the Web 1.0 model of creating and publishing content online. Whereas Web 1.0 limited the control of creating and publishing content to specific individuals, Web 2.0 expanded the capabilities and granted control to all users of the World Wide Web. This model of participatory and collaborative thinking became the platform behind the ideological and technological foundation of Social Media. In short, Web 2.0 is a place for people to share, cooperate and co-create (Freeman and Chapman, 2008). Some examples of Web 2.0 include wikis, blogs, podcasts and social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter. The present research proposes to conduct an in-depth study of the role of social media in tourism marketing in India with special reference to Uttar Pradesh.

User Generated Content represents all the ways in which end-users of the web use Social Media. According to the Organization of Economic Co-Operation and Development (2007), UGC (User Generated Content) must: (1) be publically accessible to a selected group of people, (2) show creative effort and (3) been built outside of professional routines and practices. Examples of UGC include anything produced by the web user such as text, audio and video. The first condition of UGC requires context to be published on a website and made publically accessible, this excludes emails and instant messaging. The second condition of UGC requires users to upload original content, thus excluding reposted material. The final condition of UGC requires content to be created out of the desire to connect and express oneself to others as well as to achieve fame and recognition. Therefore according to the third condition of OCED (2007), UGC excludes content with a commercial market.

Many companies have now discovered that traditional forms of advertisement such as television programs and commercials are having less impact on consumers. According to David Penn (2006), the previous rational models of advertisement have been abandoned as the important brand response of the modern consumer is unconscious and emotional. Organizations are now tapping into the untainted, unfiltered and unbiased feedback of consumers on social media networks (Blackshaw and Nazzaro, 2004). Social media users expect the content they view on the web to be authentic and transparent however, businesses are using covert advertisements to pose as either entertainment or consumer-generated media (Freeman and Chapman, 2007).

The study (Alan Pomering and Gary Noble and Lester W. Johnson, 2011) outlines how tourism marketing and sustainability of marketing elements such as product, price, promotion, place, participants, process, physical evidence, partnership, packaging and programming could potentially play a role in implementing sustainable tourism.

Social media are still considered as a relatively new concept and referred to a set of online tools which support social interaction. The term allows differentiating from traditional media like television or newspapers, where content is made and published by professionals. Through social media tools users can collaboratively create, search, share and evaluate the large amount of information available online, as well as connect to, inform, inspire and track other participants (Hans *et al.*, 2011).

Digital platforms such Facebook and Twitter allow increasing importance of consumer influence. Moreover, online opinions generally influence offline opinions, as they move into the traditional media (Smith, 2009). This Web 2.0 revolution is seen all around, even for those people who are not actively involved in social media. Although in the beginning social media were used by individuals only for peer-to-peer communication, with the lapse of time professionals started to utilize Web 2.0 platforms for business communications (Spekman, 2010).

With the advent of Internet and social media in particular, marketing tasks have become considerably easier for SMEs, defined by the European Commission as the "enterprises, which employ fewer than 10 persons and whose annual turnover or annual balance sheet total

does not exceed 2 million euro" (Psaila, 2007).

The processes for communicating with consumers have changed significantly with the emergence of the phenomenon known as social media, also referred to as consumer-generated media. This form of media'' describes a variety of new sources of online information that are created, initiated, circulated and used by consumers intent on educating each other about products, brands, services, personalities, and issues'' (Blackshaw and Nazzaro, 2004).

In tourism, consumers' behaviour has always been influenced by development of ICTs, but Web 2.0 has completely changed how consumers design and consume travel related products (Buhalis and Law, 2008). During the travel planning process social media get an important role, because it gives access to other travellers' experiences as an ultimate information source (Chung and Buhalis, 2008; Yoo *et al.,* 2011). However, there is not yet an agreed term to describe social media, the academic literature also evidences a disagreement on the classification of social media according to Fotis *et al.* (2012). They collected the different grouping from several research works and they found that some of them propose just two, five, eight, or more than ten social media types Social networking sites (eg. Facebook or IWIW: the second most important in Hungary) have digitalized human social connections. Nowadays people have more and more friends and trying to maintain their social connections through these sites, while face to face connections permanently decrease. Plenty of social media sites exist with different purposes and functionality. Social networking sites are key platforms where users can become members, create a profile, and build a personal network connecting them to other users with whom they share their own content (Boyd and Ellison, 2007; Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010; Kietzmann *et al.*, 2011; Xiang and Gretzel, 2010).

In the tourism sector the world's largest Web 2.0 site (travel review site) is the Tripadvisor, serves more than 74 million users per month who seek advice about their travel plans and hosts more than 75 million real travel reviews and opinions. This site offers trusted advice from real travellers and a wide variety of travel choices and planning features with seamless links to booking tools (www.tripadvisor.com). These two sites connect each other through a common application so called Tripfriend. The purpose of this cooperation is that tourists could collect proper information about the selected destination from their close acquaintance.

A huge transition from "one to one" online communication to "one to many" channels and platforms has opened new possibilities for small companies in particular to interact with their potential customers. Unlike the traditional media, such as television and magazines, where material and message are being created by marketing professionals, social media allows all users to create and share information and thus inspire others to do the same (Hans *et al.*, 2011). Online platforms such as Face book, YouTube and Twitter are most responsible for the increasing importance of customers influence. Online opinions are valuable because they influence offline opinions as they move to the traditional media. This means that these online opinions are influencing even those customers who are not engaging in social media communication.

The days when television and radio advertisements captured the attention of millions of consumers and were increasing sales for many are long gone. Today, businesses are turning to the Internet, where web searching and social networking is dominating the way consumers are researching and looking for products and services. This change has a huge impact on marketers, and the way they have been reaching consumers has to be revolutionized.

With the introduction of Web 2.0 and social media marketing tasks have become considerably easier for small enterprises, but even though the interest for the implementation of social media appeared back in 2004, the phenomenon of social media and its use in micro companies does not attract researchers (Barnes *et al.*, 2012).

Social media as an effective marketing tool in tourism:

Social media plays an increasingly vital role in many aspects of tourism, especially in information search, decision-making behaviors and tourism promotion focusing on best practices for interacting with consumers via social media channels (social sharing of holiday experiences). It encompasses a wide range of online, word-of-mouth forums including blogs, company-sponsored discussion boards and chatrooms, consumer-to-consumer e-mail, consumer product or service ratings websites and forums, Internet discussion boards and forums, mob logs (sites containing digital audio, images, movies, or photographs), and social networking websites,

to name a few. Tourism businesses make use of online travel sites to:

– Attract travellers

– Connect with their guests, and develop their trust.

– Create interest and appeal to their products or services.

– Conduct an easy and reliable market research about travellers' choices.

– Give feedback and keep connection with present and future travellers in a very personal and informal way.

Weblogs are becoming very important tools affecting information search since their links, content (using keywords regularly) and popularity influence the ranking of a company on a search engines (Sigala, 2007).

Tourism industry is making use of social networking sites to achieve better position in the competition and for attracting larger number of tourists. It was observed that creating a Facebook fan page enables different tourism businesses to easily, cheaply and quickly reach scores of people, interact with past and potential visitors, attend interaction with fans or even give opportunity for reserving their accommodation on the page. Almost everyone loves sharing experiences about their vacation. Past visitors' positive experiences and stories are genuine third party contributions which may encourage others to visit. It is a free of charge marketing tool for all tourism businesses (Fotis *et al.*, 2012).

In the tourism sector the world's largest Web 2.0 site (travel review site) is the Tripadvisor, serves more than 74 million users per month who seek advice about their travel plans and hosts more than 75 million real travel reviews and opinions. This site offers trusted advice from real travellers and a wide variety of travel choices and planning features with seamless links to booking tools (www.tripadvisor.com).

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Influence of social media on the decisions of tourists:

Tourists in order to decrease the uncertainty derive from the travel decisions collect more and more indispensable information in connection with the travel. Altering tourists (consumer behaviour) trust even more in other travellers' opinions rather than official marketing advices due to the spread of social media sites and user-generated contents. Many tourists need to obtain confirmation of other users that they have planned the best trip. An opinion or recommendations from an acquaintance or friend have a huge impact on the tourists' travel decision making process (Sigala, 2007). Social media is becoming a very important information source for international travellers for getting travel advice and suggestions of tourism suppliers. Gretzel and Yoo (2008) have shown that "reviews play an important role in the trip planning process for those who actively read them. They provide ideas, make decisions easier, add fun to the planning process and increase confidence by reducing risk making it easier to image what places will be like". When reading and sharing one's travel experience through weblogs, this also creates the willingness to travel and visit the same destination.

Sweetwood (2017) describes influencers on social media as people who are constantly marketing themselves and creating awareness around their image or a brand that they have created around themselves. This type of marketing is defined as personal branding, that is the practice of people who are marketing themselves. Personal branding is about establishing a certain image as a brand. With a strong and powerful brand, people will find that person interesting and want to know more about that person.

Keller (1993) talked about this relationship in the way that organisations form with influencers is defined as a secondary brand association, where the beliefs that the consumer has about the product can be under the influence from the influencer himself. Therefore, it is important to find an influencer who matches the product or the service. A study conducted by Silvera and Austad (2004) regarding attitude towards the person promoting the organisation supports, the importance is finding a right influencer for the product or service. The study found that the consumer´s perception is influenced by the feeling that the consumer has towards if the influencers genuinely like the product or service or not.

Role of social media in advertising and promotion:

Situated in northern part of India and bordering with the capital of India, New Delhi, Uttar Pradesh is a very popular tourist destination in India. Uttar Pradesh is immensely rich in historical monuments and religious places. Geographically, Uttar Pradesh is very diverse with Himalayan foothills in extreme North and Gangetic plain

in centre.

The State Government of Uttar Pradesh has undertaken various measures to develop and promote tourism in the State. Uttar Pradesh tourism department is promoting Heritage Arc that run across Agra, Lucknow and Varanasi. It effortlessly tries to highlight and showcase different culture, art, culture and varieties of cuisine. This arc is well connected with all modes of transportation. The tourist spots are publicised through website/posters/ brochures, advertisements in various media, participation in international and national travel marts and seminars. The official website of Uttar Pradesh tourism also displays its various social media links. The social media is influencing the tourists greatly in choosing various destinations in Uttar Pradesh for their trips. It is also helpful in searching information about the tourism attractions of Uttar Pradesh and building an image at the world tourism market.

Spurgeon (2008) mentioned that new media platforms and marketing methods have forced marketers to rethink their role in advertising. Today advertisers are not always the top-down communicators for the messages their brands, products or services are creating with the advertisement. According to Spurgeon, media consumers play a key role in marketing and especially on social media. Spurgeon also states that the consumers are an active part of the process. With ever-changing market environment and technology has changed the way marketers behave, where and how they market. Before the advent of social media applications and websites, the ability to create and distribute con- tent on the Internet was limited to organisations and the media. But in todays' advanced electronic era of consumers have access to the internet and have the capability to contribute, interact and distribute information, pictures or videos online and, consequently, marketing has become a two-way communication between consumers and service provides. Organisations therefore need to align and integrate electronic social media applications to increase their success and effectiveness (Mustonen, 2009).

Research shows that policies for a local tourism company to be successful in promotion must be: more creative and spectacular, limited to an essential publicity message, to repeat the advertisement where frequency is essential and to use images. .A very good tourism image, but not supported by quality services, and adequate material resources, is unnecessary and may be costly.

Conclusion:

This research investigates how social media advertising effects consumer behaviour towards tourism especially in Uttar Pradesh. The importance of social media in tourism is great. These platforms not only give the tourists an opportunity to express themselves, share opinions, give feedback whether positive or negative, reviews and experiences which other tourists may use as a reference in their future travel planning and arrangements. Influencers on social media also affect the consumers behaviour when it comes to the decision making process of a product or a service Today traditional forms of advertisement such as television programs and commercials are having lesser impact on consumers. Although opinion or recommendation from an acquaintance or friend has a huge impact on the tourists' travel decision making process, which even more alter the original plan of tourists, yet the impact of social media platforms cannot be underestimated. In the years to come this impact will increase immensely.

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