

Impact of social media on e-tourism: A critical analysis of determinants of decision making

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Abstract

E-Tourism is an emerging trend among the other e-commerce market. Availability of online tourism services has transformed the traditional approach of people in planning their tours and it engage nearly three-fourth of e-commerce share in India. Social media has boomed as the new mode to connect people thus leveraging the impact of social media platform to promote tourism products has established to be an excellent strategy. Social networking sites such as blogs, micro blogs, consumer review sites, content community sites with maximum number of hits, wikis, internet forums and location based social media enable the users to communicate in a way to achieve information search, decision-making and also used by the service providers to achieve promoting tourism services. Exploratory research on the impact of social media in tourism is still in infancy. This paper reports on an online research to establish the various determinants of decision making on using social media for availing tourism services. Research tool is developed based on the extensive review of literature and an online survey is made among the users of relevant social media sites. The data is collected and quantitatively analysed to derive significant factors affecting the decision making of tourists. The authors would also like to acknowledge the funding under RUSA 2.0 Scheme of MHRD, Govt of India.

Keywords:

Online Tourism, Social Networking, Social Media, Social Media Marketing, HITS

1 Introduction

Impact of social media on availing e-tourism covers a range of activities starting from the interactions among the different people to share, create or exchange the knowledge and information gathered through virtual networks and communities. Thus, social media become an important segment in availing all sorts of e-commerce activities where the enormous impact is associated with tourism. Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, YouTube, Whatsapp, Wechat, Hello, Pinterest, Snapchat, Google Plus are the social media platforms taken for this study and these platforms are very important in considering both personal and business perspectives. Social media users engage in communicating with these platforms to make informed decisions about their tour plans and used to share their own experiences and personal views on specific hotels, cuisines and other service providers. Thus, they become an inevitable source of information that cannot be ignored. The social media platform is used to share both before and after travel experiences, either good or bad and covers a wider audience in their network. The impact of such social media on tourism is an emerging research area to explore. Starting from the information search to final decision-making behavior, the impact of social media is vital and it also aids in promoting the various tour and travel service providers.

The social media platform made an effective impact and it transformed the scenery of marketing practices. Most of the customers rely on the shares and reviews on the social media platform to determine their travel plans. Building a positive brand reputation on an online platform is very important for service providers to integrate travelers who rely on social media. Thus, the emergence of social media has interrupted the traditional models of customer service by travel and hospitality service providers.

2 Literature Review

The hospitality and tourism industry is progressing and experiencing fundamental changes across the globe. The traditional practices need to be upgraded through the integration of modern developments by acquiring skills and knowledge to perform the required innovation (Zainal, Radzi, HashimChik& Abu, 2012). It is commanding that we have an empathetic approach to the present issues so that we are able to create remedies for the problems and prospects. There is a famous saying, "A Picture is worth a thousand words". (Hanan&Putit, 2013) Based on this, the rapidly developed digital media concentrates on picture-based social media platforms such as Instagram, Twitter, Pinterest, Tumbler, Snapbucket and other picture-based social media apps for promotion and marketing of tourist destinations and service providers. The vast usages of social media apps in the last decade have given a new approach to the promotion and marketing of tourism-based services. Tourism service providers must adopt these technology advancements to stand in a competitive environment (Roque & Raposo, 2016). More literature on the impact of social media in influencing the decision-making behavior of social media users is discussed in a scientific way (Mir, 2017). Also, Zeng & Gerritsen (2014) made a review paper which includes an extensive collection of literature study which deals with the research on the impact of social media in the

tourism industry. It also concludes that the research is still in its infancy. SahinandSengun (2015) have conducted a research on the impact of social media in the tourism industry. It involves a survey on the students of Atilim University to assess the impact of social media in the younger generation. The results discussed both positive and negative impacts. Personal experiences, reviews, feedback and comments made by the users produced major significance in creating the impact on decision-making behavior. Rubico&Felicen (2014) made a similar research in Batangas province. The respondents of the research included both the tourism service providers and beneficiaries. It discusses the impact of social media on the promotion and marketing of tourism services. The outcome will not be positive at all times and thus the service providers need to equip themselves in providing immediate response actions for the problems arising due to the negative side of these social media platforms.

Objectives:

1. To analyze the awareness level of the respondents on the usage of social media for availing e-tourism services.
2. To find the usage level of social media among the respondents for availing e-tourism services.
3. To identify the determinants of decision making among the respondents in availing e-tourism services.

3 Methodology

A quantitative survey was designed in July 2019 consisting of 11 questions. It was divided into four sections: 1) user demographics; 2) level of usage of social media platforms; 3) awareness level of the various e-tourism websites and applications; 4) determinants of decision making for availing online tourism services.

The research instrument was initially piloted on a small sample of users of social media platforms including Facebook, Instagram and Twitter. After performing reliability checking, few minor revisions were made. Additional questions about the determinants of decision-making behavior were included in the revised survey instrument. Later the survey was administered using the online survey tool, 'FourEyes'. Survey link is given to the followers and users in social media pages such as IRCTC, Yatra, MakeMyTrip, ClearTrip, EaseMyTrip, Travel Guru, Goibibo, Expedia, Trivago and Tripadvisor in various platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, YouTube, Whatsapp, Wechat, Hello, Pinterest, Snapchat and Google Plus.

Participation was voluntary and no incentives were offered. A total of 621 potential participants accessed the online survey and after the removal of unusable responses, a sample of 540 participants was retained.

4 Findings

Among the users 53% of the respondents are Single and 44% are married while 53% of the respondents are having post-graduation educational qualifications. 28% of the respondents are spending more than 2 hrs per day on the social media platform. Among the usage level of various social media platforms, Whatsapp leads with the highest usage level by which 39% of the respondents often use Whataspp groups and Broadcast pages followed by YouTube, Facebook and Instagram as verified in Table 1.

Table 1: Usage level of the social media platform

S. No	Social Media Platform	Level of Usage (%)
1.	Whatsapp	39
2.	YouTube	35
3.	Facebook	25
4.	Instagram	20
5.	Google Plus	17
6.	Pinterest	16
7.	Hello	14
8.	Snap chat	14
9.	Twitter	14
10.	Wechat	12

Source: Computed Data

Among the various e-tourism service providers, agents and travel sites, MakeMyTrip leads in the awareness level as verified in Table 2.

Table 2: Awareness level of e-tourism service providers

S. No	e-Tourism Service Providers	Awareness Level (%)
1.	MakeMyTrip	33
2.	IRCTC	32
3.	Trivago	26
4.	Goibibo	25
5.	Tripadvisor	24
6.	Yatra	23
7.	ClearTrip	22
8.	EaseMyTrip	20
9.	Travel Guru	19
10.	Expedia	18

Source: Computed Data

Factor analysis had given six-factor solutions to find out the determinants of decision making among the social media users in availing e-tourism services. The resultsrevealed that all the factors taken together had explained 90.85 percent of

the total variations. Further, the results were reliable as the communality values were high. They are discussed below.

Table 3: Variables with the highest factor loadings determining the decision making

Factor	Newly Extracted Factors (Determinants of Decision Making)	Factor Loadings
F1	Security	0.928
F2	The framework of the Application/Website	0.905
F3	Cost Effectiveness	0.890
F4	Reliability	0.906
F5	Special Promotions	0.857
F6	Ease of Usage	0.965

Source: Computed Data

It is seen from Table 3 that the 'Security', 'Framework of the Application/Website', 'Cost-Effectiveness', 'Reliability', 'Special Promotions' and 'Ease of Usage', with their respective scores of 0.928, 0.905, 0.890, 0.906, 0.857, and 0.965 respectively were found to be having the highest loadings under Factors F1, F2, F3, F4, F5 and F6. These were the identified six individual variables which are the determinants of the decision-making behavior among the social media users in availing e-tourism services. The factor F6 "Ease of Usage" secured the highest factor loading with a score of 0.965 followed by factors, F1, F4, F2, F3, and F5.

The first factor (Security) consists of five variables with the reliability co-efficient of 0.928. They were: Protection of Personal Information, Protection of Credit/Debit Card Details, No information passing without consent, Protection of Web Shopping Behaviour and Available of adequate security features.

The second factor (Framework of the Application/Website) consists of four variables with the reliability coefficient of 0.905. They were: Manageable Storage Size of the application, Visually Attractive & Creative Applications, Clear & Logically Sequenced Layout of the Sites and Easy Navigation.

The third factor (Cost-Effectiveness) consists of three variables with the reliability co-efficient of 0.890. They were: Best value for money, Cheaper pricing than other traditional modes of booking and Cashback facilities.

The fourth factor (Reliability) consists of four variables with the reliability co-efficient of 0.906. They were: Availability of Customer Service representatives, Immediate response for the queries, Reducing dependency on intermediaries and Prevention of application/website crash.

The fifth factor (Special promotions) consists of three variables with the reliability co-efficient of 0.857. They were: Extensive deals & offers, Offers on group booking, honeymoon packages & pilgrimage packages, etc., and Frequent Ads & Pop-ups.

The sixth factor (Ease of usage) consists of six variables with the reliability coefficient of 0.965. They were: Availability of Huge variety of information, Availability of Information in different languages, Availability of quality of information regarding availability, price & features of the travel & hospitality services and Saving Search Histories.

5 Conclusion

The goal of this research paper is to find the determinants of decision-making behavior among social media users in availing e-tourism services. Thus, the major determinants with significant reliability co-efficient are Ease of Usage, Security, Reliability, Framework of the Application/Website, Cost Effectiveness and Special Promotions respectively.

It is clear that the present and future generations are becoming more and more accustomed to using the Internet for the necessities rather than to look for them physically. In this fast-paced life, there exists limited leisure time to directly interact with people and service providers which used to take more time and usage of money. Thus, availing e-tourism services evidently reduces the time and cost among the users. Also, the emerging trends of e-tourism have drastically reduced marketing and advertising expenditures. On the other hand, the service providers can pass on these benefits to the customers and thus a competitive industry development will occur.

6 About the author

Dr. V. Sivakumar is the first author of this research article. He is an accomplished marketing professor with a comprehensive blend of academic experience and research knowledge in the field of agricultural marketing. His field of expertise extends to a variety of interrelated areas such as marketing, consumer behavior, tourism and hospitality research, logistics and supply chain management.

Degree: B.E (Agri), M. B. A, M. Phil, PhD

As an innovative teacher devoted to education and learning, he also made a lot of scholarly contributions and published more than 40 research papers in international and national journals. He is currently working as the Head in charge of the Department of Tourism and Hotel Management, Alagappa University.

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