Role of Social Media in Promoting Tourism Business – A Study on Tourism Promotion in Odisha

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ABSTRACT

The use of Internet and other information communication technologies leads to a new era of tourism economy. Social media, as one of most powerful online networking tools, has been integrated into a part of social and economic life in the real world. Wikipedia defines social media as the means of interactions among people in which they create share, exchange and comment contents among themselves in virtual communities and network. It includes social networking sites, blogs, microblogs, consumer review sites, content community sites, wikis, internet forums and location based social media. Social 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 interactions. The importance of social media is growing in the realm of the tourism industry. More and more researchers are undertaking studies in the areas of the impact of social media on the tourism industry. The social media proved to be a major communication vehicle that spread across the region like wildfire. Tourism industry is one of the sectors that have beneficiated the most from the internet and as a result social media has become an integral part of any central or state tourism promotion and planning. This study investigates use of social media by Odisha Tourism in tourism promotion. The primary objective is to develop a framework on social media for tourism promotion in Odisha.

Keywords: Tourism, internet, social media, marketing, business, Promotion

Introduction

The last decade has seen a significant increase in the use of both social media and the general development of new technology worldwide. The tourism and hospitality industry has seen an impressing development since the

beginning although over the past few years, due to the recession, people have started cutting down on vacations and sales have decreased, further leading to lower revenue, lower payoffs and decreasing work segment. Today, the industry is on the rise again and has changed dramatically with the overwhelming appearance of social media platforms creating new opportunities to progress and attract the customer through facilitated communication and empowered guest engagement.

It can only be seen as something positive for the tourism and hospitality industry as it has so much to offer. It is still on a rise and provides a way to increase profits. Nevertheless, one of the most essential problems that service providers have encountered is how to engage in social media marketing and how to validate whether it is profitable for their business to use it or not. Therefore, some of the most challenging aspects include the considerations of how one measures these results; how one determines the business value of social media, how one realizes the importance of social media to any organization, how one makes use of social media for a business in order for it to be accepted by the community whilst enhancing the brand and lastly how one measures the value of the accomplished efforts.

It is commonly perceived that social media's return on investment in the tourism and hospitality industry cannot be measured, because of the perishable and intangible character of the tourism product, additionally because the return on investment is not always considered a concrete aspect. For example, business reputation or associations of a brand with specific characteristics are not features that can be measured, but are still important for a stakeholder and can be easily achieved with the help of social media marketing. Of course financial aspects cannot be foreseen, but in the end "the relationship is apparent and significant: Socially engaged companies are in fact more financially successful. As social media is growing at significant growth rate, it can be use as a marketing tool for all industries. The tourism industry is primed to take advantage of social media outlets, as the industry has long relied largely on destination reputation, consumer opinion, spread of information, and positive word-of-mouth advertising. In many instances, such as the case of the 'Incredible India' campaign and 'Bharat Darshan' campaign, integration of social media into the marketing strategy of Indian Tourism has shown remarkable, measurable results in increased rates of visits as well as visitor satisfaction. As a result, various states around the country are becoming more reliant on social media as a cost-efficient and effective tool for tourism marketing for their respective state.

Literature Review

UNWTO defines tourism as "a social, cultural and economic phenomenon, which entails the movement of people to countries or places outside their usual environment for personal or business/professional purposes".

For some tourism represents relaxation and fun, a trip during the holiday weeks away from work, and some doubt the need for study and research. But for others, tourism is a source of employment; it is a business that brings revenue to millions of people around the world; it is a source of living. Therefore it is important to research it, analyze it and study it more attentively. A.M. Kaplan, M. Haenlein (2010) offer a more technology savvy definition, stating that "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". "Web 2.0 refers to the principles and practice of facilitating information sharing and social interaction by users generating, altering and uploading web based content" (Liburd, 2012). Mashable.com (2010) states, "social media is real life." Levinson and Gibson (2010) define social media from a marketer point of view as "a set of tools that are free or nearly free and allow marketers and the community to create content and meaningful conversation online". Some examples of social media are "blogs, photo sharing sites, video sharing sites, social networks, audio podcasts, Internet radio, mobile social sharing and communication tools" .According to B&C (2010), the term "social media" is widely used nowadays. The first time it appeared was in 2004, after LinkedIn created its social networking application. The applications primarily an online technology tool to allow people to communicate easily, utilizing the Internet to share and discuss information. According to Zarrella (2010), social Media is defined best in the context of the previous industrial media paradigm. Traditional media such as television, newspapers, radio and magazines are one-way, static broadcasting technologies. Zarrella (2010) argues that magazines and newspapers are distributing expensive content to consumers while advertisers pay for the privilege to insert their ads into the content. According to Howison, Finger, and Hauschka (2014) Internet technology has disturbed the traditional business models of many industries, including media, finance and retail and this has had great implications in the tourism industry. The Internet and the new emerging social media have transformed traditional marketing and communication strategies used in the tourism industry. The impact of Internet on the way of doing business is so tremendous. It lifted geographical barriers and provided users with new forms of interactive media. This is supported by Loda (2014) who states that the digital revolution has already changed almost everything about how business is conducted in the tourism industry. The tourism industry has greatly benefited from the new opportunities offered by the Internet. Luliana et al. (2013: 67) argue that the Internet, especially through the social media platform, has changed how marketers and consumers communicate.

Today traditional role of 'Word-of-Mouth (WOM)', publicity has transformed by online marketing publicity. ICT technologies and use of internet has been changing the way, tourism business operate. The 21st century tourism promotion has entered a new era as web have been become a powerful tool to promote tourism at every country, region, state or destination. The first marketing initiative of its kind, Incredible India was conceptualized in 2002, which successfully established India as a high-end tourist destination, generating a 16%

increase in tourist traffic in the first year. Tourism is a sunrise sector and Indian State Governments are trying to position themselves strongly in the domestic as well as international markets.

Rationale of the study

Tourism is regarded as a critical component on the National Development Plan many countries because of its capacity to spur growth across the wider economy and create jobs. There is a need for ongoing efforts to promote the tourism industry for it to remain competitive and continue contributing to the welfare of the people .The study is anticipated to broaden the understanding of the utilisation of social media in promoting tourism in order to aid the decision making process of the marketers and assist in policy formulation. The benefits of social media in marketing tourism are immense to both the tourism promoters and the travellers. There are great opportunities in the tourism industry in Odisha which need to be fully exploited. As the usage of Social Media tools continue to grow and evolve, we need to form a better understanding of the ardent role of Social Media in a traveler's travel choices and develop a working relationship model that could help tourism officials better understand the optimum approaches to Social Media marketing to promote their tourism products and destinations. Therefore, the motivation for this study was based on the need to understand the influence of social media in promoting tourism business activities in Odisha.

Scope of the study

The scope of the study was confined to Odisha Tourism .i.e. Department of Tourism, Government of Odisha and how the use of social media by both travellers and tourism organisations enhances promotional efforts in the industry. The study investigates how influential social media is in promoting the tourism industry in the Odisha.

Objectives

1. To study the awareness of social media approach in tourism.

2. To examine the role and impact of Social Media Marketing approach in tourism business.

3. To investigate and generate strategies which will assist Odisha tourism in developing an effective use of social media for tourism promotion.

Research Methodology

Due to nature of the study, a qualitative research approach was used to examine the study. The study is basically exploratory in nature. The research methodology adopted is based on the secondary data from the

reliable sources along with Primary data was collected in form of interviews with industry experts who comprised of ministry of Tourism in Odisha and established Travel agencies and tour operators in Odisha. All discussions were recorded during telephone conversation. The data was then transferred to a Microsoft Word document in order to avoid omitting information or ambiguous errors. Extensive secondary data is collected through books, published government reports, related articles in journals, newspapers and electronic sources.

Social Media and Tourism

According to B&C (2010), the term "social media" is widely used nowadays. The first time it appeared was in 2004, after LinkedIn created its social networking application. The applications primarily an online technology tool to allow people to communicate easily, utilizing the Internet to share and discuss information. According to Zarrella (2010), social Media is defined best in the context of the previous industrial media paradigm. Traditional media such as television, newspapers, radio and magazines are one-way, static broadcasting technologies. He argues that magazines and newspapers are distributing expensive content to consumers while advertisers pay for the privilege to insert their ads into the content. Readers, in turn, have no possibility to send the editors instant feedback in the case they disagree with something. New web technologies have made it easy for anyone to create, and most importantly, to distribute their own content. A blog post, a "tweet" on Twitter, or a YouTube. Video can be produced and viewed by millions virtually for free. Advertisers do not have to pay publishers or distributor's huge sums of money to embed their ads; now they can create their own interesting content that viewers will flock to Also, Weber (2009), states that traditional media such as television, radio and newspapers are providing one-way communication; while social media, on the other hand, allows everyone to publish and to contribute in online conversations. He defines social media as "the online place where people with a common interest can gather to share thoughts, comments and opinions". He further states that social media consists of social networks, such as Facebook, branded web destinations, like Amazon.com and ebay.com and companies, such as IBM and Dell.

Social media marketing experts underscore the advantages of using social media for marketing as the ability to reach a wide audience, two-ways communication, accessibility and viral effect. Social media marketing promises to improve promotional efforts significantly. One of the major advantages of social media marketing is the ability to reach a wide audience breaking down geographic boundaries. Historically communication with others was limited by geographical boundaries. Today's social media technologies enable nearly everyone to reach a global audience for interpersonal interaction and exchanging information and encompasses tools and platforms that enable people from different part of the world to be connected and to exchange information with each other.

The social media effects on tourism are profound and can be contributed to the popularity of user written reviews, video and photo sharing, blogging, and the localization of the Internet. Travelers use social media to discuss where they are going, what attractions they are seeing, and what restaurants they are visiting. Additionally, travelers research venues and attractions before they book a trip. They provide feedback about their experiences when they get home. Social media and the Internet are not just a part of traveler's lives; with most carrying Internet enabled cell phones, the Internet is integrated into their activities.

How some of the ways are in which social media is vital to the tourism and hospitality industry:

- Hotels and travel agencies that are good at using social media are able to have effective social media interventions. With organizations including information about their service they help grow their brand perception. They also give customers an opportunity to speak well of their experience and also allowing them to offer immediate response to negative responses.

- Given the tendency of most people to use social media to share their holiday experiences and customer service experience during their trip, they help hotels and booking agencies to advertise on their behalf. This is also the case before and after a trip. Details such as the quality of the rooms, speed and quality of customer experience are all factors that help in cementing the reputation of organizations in the tourism sector.

- By engaging with social media, hotels now have dedicated teams that monitor social comments on a daily basis. The quality and promptness on customer issues nowadays can either make or break the brand of a company or a hotel. Social media is a low-cost and high-impact marketing strategy in increasing customer engagement and satisfaction.

- Nowadays it is no longer necessary for individuals to go all the way to a certain destination to be able to know if that is where they will spend their vacation at that particular destination. It is now possible to get a visual idea of a certain destination through social media. Through pictures, videos and sometimes even special holiday offers that hotels post on their social media sites, it becomes easier to choose a holiday destination all at the touch of a button.

- Different social media channels share different types of information. For example, YouTube can be used to create videos showcasing the hotel, or it may include videos of shows done in the hotel. The hotel can also give tours of the facilities and even interviews with customers about their experiences.

Tourism in Odisha: An over view

Odisha has been rightly regarded as a land of myriad marvels. The dynamic topographical and vegetation strength of Odisha have combined to extract some of the most stunning destinations which not only offers a

visual feast for the inquisitive visitors but also highly educative and culturally pleasing insight into one of the oldest civilizations of the world. Temples and sanctuaries beaches and waterfalls, hot springs and lakes, wildlife that is visually fascinating, crafts that are colourful and vibrant and the numerous festivals that can take on a " Juggernaut" – like momentum.. – Odisha has them all and much more for intending tourists and visitors. Cradled between the sunlit water of the Bay of Bengal and the heavily forests blu-hued hills of the Eastern Ghats, Odisha's beauty has a gem-like reflection, dazzling the visitor with her beguiling charms . Spread over 1,55,707 sq.kms, her rural tranquillity and great forest lands are home to all manner of wildlife whose ancestral homes lie in the deep reaches of this beautiful land 480 kms of gentle coastland undulates across a terrain that is no variegated as the prisms of a kaleidoscope. Buddhism, Jainism and Hinduism have flourished in this land with equal ease, which pays homage to its ancient deities with extravagant style from the religious architectural wonders in the Golden Triangle of Bhubaneswar – Puri - Konark, where tourists can get an encapsulated experiences of Odisha in all its infinite charm, to the mysteries of the ancient tantric temples and yogini shrines that intrigue even the most placid visitor. The glorious beaches beckon visitors with their tranquillity and turbulent waters while cavorting dolphins trend the channel waters of Chilika Lake in playful abandon Healing springs and limpid lakes in breathtaking hues stun the eye with their vivid visuals. Odisha's art and crafts offer visitors an indelible experience of its cultural heritage, brilliantly manifested in its itkat silk, pata paintings, silver filigree and stone carving. The artists villages at Pipili and Raghurajpur bring alive old traditions in to a colourful and flamboyantly rich fusion.

The Department of Tourism, Govt. Of Odisha has adopted a multi-prong strategy to promote tourism aggressively in source market. The following table shows the tourist arrivals to the state:

Tourist visits to Odisha

Year	Domestic		Total	% growth	Foreign	% growth	Grand Total	% growth
	From Odisha	Outside Odisha						
2012-13	55,79,909	37,11,825	92,91,734	9.67	65,522	4.30	93,57,256	9.63
2013-14	60,38,746	40,25,326	1,00,64,072	8.31	67,400	2.87	1,01,31,472	8.27
2014-15	66,30,499	44,20,852	1,10,51,351	9.81	72,215	7.14	1,11,23,566	9.79
2015-16	72,40,304	48,27,391	1,20,67,695	9.20	67,364	6.72	1,21,35,059	9.09
2016-17	78,67,321	52,45,407	1,31,12,728	8.66	77,496	15.04	1,31,90,224	8.69

Source: Annual Activities Report, Odisha, 2016-17

Results and Discussion

The role of social media in tourism has been increasingly noted and researched as an emerging topic. Social media plays an increasingly important role in many aspects of tourism, especially in information search and decision-making behaviours and tourism promotion focusing on best practices for interacting with consumers via social media channels (social sharing of holiday experiences). Leveraging off social media to market tourism products has proven to be an excellent strategy. Many countries and states regard social media as an important tool to promote their tourism industries. For example, Tourism Australia is encouraging the Australian tourism industry to positively embrace social media in promoting their business. Australian operators are being offered the chance to promote their tourism business or region using Tourism Australia's record breaking fan base by listing themselves in a 'things to do' section on its Facebook page . Meanwhile, Australian National Online Strategy Committee developed the "Tourism e-kit" tutorials package, in which "Social Media for Tourism" is the important component. Claims that social media play an increasingly important role in holiday planning and booking are always supported by the increase in number of visits to a tourism website.

Based upon the study, following could be the recommended strategies for promotion of tourism in Odisha:

- The Department of Tourism, Government of Odisha is still using the traditional methods for tourism promotion. In this competitive era, it has to shift its traditional methods of promotion to e-tourism initiatives and it should be a part of State Tourism Policies as top priority for its faster execution.

- Recently, the state tourism department of Odisha has chalked out an outreach campaign on social media to attract the tourists, mostly foreigners. However, it is not been executed properly. More promotional activities of Odisha tourism need to be undertaken via Facebook, Twitter, Linkedin, Pinterest, Youtube and Instagram. Since Facebook dominates the social media and many people are accessing Facebook frequently on their mobile phones. Hence more emphasis should be given on facebook for tourism promotion.

- Information is a competitive advantage in the global tourism market, but only the destination that can provide information faster, with greater emotional appeal and lower cost can enjoy this advantage. So, the department of Tourism, Govt. of Odisha must take the advantage of Technological development and globalization of media for creating new possibilities for information sharing among visitors in tourism through web blogs, websites or destinations´ assessment sites (such as www.tripdviser.com, www.booking.com).

- To create awareness about a particular destination of the state, photography and video competition about that destination by using social media should be held among the people like "Snow at First Sight" in 2009 to raise awareness for Colorado State in USA as a winter sport destination.

- To implement Social Media in its marketing campaign, The Canada Tourism Commission launched a website and application for i Phone or Android Smartphones- Explore Canada like a Local in 2011". Odisha Tourism also must lunch a similar campaign. The aim of the campaign will be to enhance the experience of Odisha by sharing insider information on spots of interest, by enabling visitors to plan their journey, and serving as a comprehensive guide during their trip through various Social Media channels and the application. This led to travellers sharing travel tips, photos, videos, and new venues that were not featured anywhere.

- Live internet channels can be setup of key destination at Odisha by installing cameras and allowing users to watch real time activities through social medias. By providing live coverage to users would also promote local events, traditional festivals and other activities. This would paint a realistic picture of the destination and may result in augmenting customer satisfaction as the expectations would be built on facts. This will also foster to build social communities around the destination as consumers of wide interests can easily find information relevant to their interests in an entertaining manner.

- A content calendar is required to be prepared by Odisha Tourism which will be an essentially planning tool to guide the content that will be promoted using social media and timings of undertaking the promotion.

- Further the promotion can be extended by manipulating interactive videos and pictures. Odisha Tourism can circulate several video clips and pictures in social networks and blogs of various attractions of the destination. If a customer likes any restaurant, shopping mall, festival in a picture or a video clip, he simply clicks on the object to get further details of it.

- Another aspect that has to be taken into be carefully monitored is that information displayed about the promotions and happenings of the destination should be consistently updated as users are very regular on social media. This will satisfy the functional need of the tourist. Functional needs are met when community members go online to fulfil specific activities. It encompasses information collection for both learning purposes and facilitates decision-making.

Conclusion

Social media continues to grow. It increasingly influences on many social and economic aspects. Social media plays a very important role in the tourism industry. The tourism industry deals with potential travelers, people on a trip, and people returning from a trip and sharing their experience. The study portrays Social Media as a

means of creating / increasing awareness of the destination, reaching out to masses, encouraging travellers to plan their journey, strengthening the destination image as a favourite destination, targeting new / specific market, spreading positive word of mouth, increasing number of visitors, creating buzz around the destination, increasing the number of Facebook / Twitter fan base, changing the appeal of the destination in the mind of visitors, creating a brand image for the destinations, and more. So, Social Media has been widely accepted as a means of promoting tourism destinations and products by popular destination marketing organizations. As a result of the studies on the subject of social media in the tourism industry with reference to Odisha tourism it would be wise for Odisha Tourism to have a strong presence on social media allowing for consistent and effective two way communication between itself and the tourists. Odisha Tourism must highlight the most appealing attributes of its various destinations. It would be a mistake for Odisha Tourism unless it has a strong a presence on social media. The amount of time consumers spend on social media can be utilized to present a destination image to consumers. It also serves as a way to converse with consumers and share information about updates, deals, and giveaways.

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