INFLUENCE OF ELECTRONIC WORD OF MOUTH ON DESTINATION CHOICE

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Abstract

Social Media is an online platform for sharing knowledge and experiences with peers and friends. It acts as a reviewing tool wherein people rate their experiences about places and destinations thus impacting word of mouth marketing. It is as very important for marketing as a review from friends and peers can act as single most effective influencer in one's decision making when it comes to choosing a destination. People share experiences, photos, and other content and it acts as indirect marketing for destinations. This research was intended to discover and measure the influence of social media on an intending tourist choosing and selecting a destination over other choices. The sampling technique which was used in collecting the data was non-probability judgmental technique. Cochran's Sampling was used to determine the sample size. Total sample size was 215 respondents who underwent travel to Srinagar from Feb 2019-August 2019. Various variables were analyzed using SPSS and it was found that the social media had a significant relationship with the destination selection. This research would be very valuable to all the stakeholders in hospitality and tourism sector to use social media to reach out to potential tourists and treat it as a platform to measure new trends and review existing customers.

Keywords: Social media, influencers, tourism marketing, tourist destination.

INTRODUCTION

It is a fact that people use social media to express their experiences and thoughts with their friends and peers, and it is this curiosity in humans to share and the attraction of likeminded people to accept it and imbibe it in their lives that makes Work of Mouth marketing being taken so seriously in the marketing domain. Especially with the advent of internet and especially social media, word of mouth has expanded exponentially and been a source of information dissemination and this had a strong impact how people would make their choices. Electronic word of mouth is a relatively new concept which means influencing through people sharing information over the internet and influencing others to buy or use products or services. Social media is especially useful in e-WoM and very effective. Word of Mouth over internet is useful because it is independent, objective, and certainly not influenced by any revenue consideration on the basis of marketer. Most of the information which is available on the internet and social media is highly trusted and sought after by the people who are looking to make marketing choices or buying decisions. In tourism sector especially, word of mouth marketing plays a very important role in influencing visitors' decisions to choose their destination. Internet has become the main source of information for the prospective tourists. People who want to go to a destination read reviews and ratings online to decide which destination they should spare their time on. They read other people's reviews that had already spent the time experiencing those destinations. It has a relative superiority over other information which is primarily propaganda. Today more than 90% of the internet regarding the destination over the internet and only less than 10% from other sources which include brochures, magazines etc. When a person decides

sto get the information from the internet or social media or a blog, it makes most of the biases go away. Most of the information on the internet which can be called as electronic word of mouth marketing is trusted by consumers as it is mostly filled with honest reviews rather than marketing gimmicks. Plus, there are various kinds of social media which fits everybody's taste and one can easily filter out the unbiased information based on the reviewer. It helps give confidence to the prospective tourist about the travel decisions. Electronic word of mouth marketing helps the reviewer in determining the attitude of the tourist and the intention behind the travel. Therefore, it can be used as an effective marketing strategy in boosting sales of tourism products and services. Even though, there is very little that marketers can influence the reviews, it can help them get feedback about their services, and they can offer value addition to their customers which can in-turn fetch better reviews. Therefore it is a free way of doing marketing research and getting feedback which can be really honest and sometimes brutal. And on the other hand, it can help the customer get valuable information about the service provider. All this is possible because eWoM is independent of the companies or service providers.

It is an informal means of communication between existing and prospective customers in the tourism industry. The result of the popularity of eWoM is because of the boom in the penetration of internet and the amount of knowledge available on the internet. Most of the information is easily accessible and most often free. It has been found that because of the immense interaction of the people on the internet, there is a free flow of information between people, governments, and other stakeholders. The tourists update the experiences on the social media, share pictures, write reviews, and comment either as positive or wanting. It helps other people plan their trip as well as how to deal with service providers. It is traditionally a free referral for others. Reviews can be explained as cost-benefit analysis of options that tourists intended to choose or what they are suggested to take. There are a lot of social media types that people frequent to choose the information they want, it can be a photo sharing website, a blog, a travelogue, a video log, YouTube, reditt type question and answer forums or even simple social media sites like Facebook and twitter. Positive eWoM can be help build a reputation and free publicity for a destination and a negative eWoM can act as a feedback. It can lead to repeat visits, as well as attract new customers. It is a type of recommendations that people give to their peers and friends on social media, and it has been found that such recommendations have a huge impact of the decision making of the choice of destination.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

WOM has traditionally been studied from the perspective of face-to-face communication (Gupta & Harris, 2010). WOM is communication about products and services between people who are perceived to be independent of the company providing the product or service, in a medium perceived to be independent of the company and WOM is acknowledged to play a considerable role in influencing and forming consumer attitudes and behavioral intentions (Jalilvand, Ebrahimi, & Samiei, 2013).There are so many tourists are looking for sites using e-WOM for more modern, fun, and easier reliable than information supplied by travel companies (Abubakar & Ilkan, 2016).Destination image and satisfaction can also affect to visit intention tourists (Abubakar & Ilkan, 2016; Hultman, Skarmeas, Oghazi, & Beheshti, 2015; Reza, Ebrahimi, & Samiei, 2013; Reza Jalilvand, Samiei, Dini, & Yaghoubi Manzari, 2012; Shawn & Feng, 2007; Stylos, Vassiliadis, Bellou, & Andronikidis, 2016; Tan, 2016).e-WOM is an informal communication tool was directed at consumers through internet-based

technologies which is relating to the usage or the particular characteristics of goods and services (Ladhari & Michaud, 2015b).With the development of the times, the word of mouth turned into e-WOM internet-based so it can encompass a wider audience (Sen & Lerman, 2007). e-WOM communicates with so many ways example, website, twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and platform with web-based (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004).

Word of mouth has been defined as "a face to face conversation between consumers about a product or service experience" (Sen &Lerman, 2007).A rise in internet technology has given a virtual space to the consumers, where every user can share their experiences about products and services(Cheung & Thadani, 2012). The potential of interpersonal influence has increased dramatically with the development of virtual connection through internet (Chevalier & Mayzlin, 2006).

Type of exchange of knowledge on online and public platform is called Electronic Word of Mouth (eWOM) (Charo et al., 2015). EWOM improves destination image of a tourist attraction and increases customer satisfaction and loyalty. Frequent and positive WOM, one coming from satisfied visitors, is a reliable indicator of customer's satisfaction and loyalty (Setiawan et.al, 2014).Internet and social media such as Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, and Blog facilitate eWOM. EWOM, either positive or negative, helps developing destination image. Empirical studies show that online review has significant influence towards destination image (Govers and Go, 2004; Mridula, 2009).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study was conducted in Srinagar, which is also considered as Venice of the east. This study was intended to study the Word of Mouth marketing among tourists who visited Srinagar. The study consisted of both international as well as domestic tourists. The sampling technique used was Non-judgmental non-probability method. A questionnaire was used to study the population. The total number of people who were surveyed was 215. This data was collected between February 2019 to August 2019. This questionnaire was administered online through Google forms.

MEASUREMENT INSTRUMENT

This research studied the Electronic word of mouth and its influence on destination choice in Srinagar. The questionnaire consisted of demographic as its first part. Second part was regarding the impact of eWoM marketing on destination choice of Srinagar.

DATA ANALYSIS

We used Cronbach's alpha to measure the internal reliability of the scale. Other methods used in this research were Structural equation model (SEM), confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), chi-square test, standardized root means square residual (SRMR), the normed chi-square statistic and the goodness-of-fit index (GFI).

RESULTS

Table 1 - Demographic Data

VARIABLES		FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
AGE	Less than 20	38	18%
	20-40	99	46%
	40-60	78	36%
GENDER	Male	135	62.7%
	Female	80	37.3%

EDUCATION	12th and Less	59	27.4%
	Graduate	81	37.6%
	Post graduate & above	75	34.8%
PURPOSE OF VISIT	Education	9	4.1%
	Recreation	176	81.8%
	Business	30	13.9%
ORIGIN	International	47	21.9%
	Domestic	168	78.1%

Table 2 shows the Cronbach's alpha where coefficients (0.70 and above) is considered acceptable, and ranged from 0.854 (e-WOM) to 0.899 (Intention to visit Srinagar)

Table 2 - Cronbach's Alpha

Variable	Cronbach's Alpha
Electronic Word of Mouth	.854
Intention to visit Srinagar	.899

Table 3 shows the correlation coefficients: e-WOM, travel intention to visit Srinagar and the correlations were all significant at the p≤0.01 level. All of the squared correlations represented good discriminant validity.

Table 3 – Correlations Coefficients

Variable	e-WoM	Intention to Visit Srinagar
Electronic Word of Mouth		.622
Intention to visit Srinagar	.622	

Table 4 shows the parameter estimates for the relationships between each independent variable and the dependent variable for which the three hypotheses were tested. Our results provided support for the relationships that we hypothesized among e-WOM and intention to travel. All links were both significant and positive.

Table 4 – Regression Weights (n-215)

Exogenous Variable	Endogenous Variable	Es.	SE	CR
Electronic Word of Mouth	Intention to travel to Srinagar	.548	.041	11.45

DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSION

This research revolves around the fact that the internet has played a significant role in the promotion of tourist marketing and especially destination choice trough Word of Mouth marketing especially over Internet. It provides an interesting statistic that electronic word of mouth is as effective as physical word of mouth marketing. Online reviews and ratings are a part of mouth of mouth marketing. It has been seen that positive value addition in service marketing has led to the managers and other professionals offer better quality and value for services. It has been long observed in the research of management that WoM marketing has the potential to attract new customers without incurring any additional cost. It has the following aspects as its core functions:

• Word of Mouth Marketing is effective both online and physically.

• It is useful for both marketers as well as customers. The marketers use it to improve their services while as customers get customized personalized information.

• Word of Mouth marketing works because of the trust level it exudes internally. No other marketing is so trustworthy as Word of Mouth as it generally stems out of the people who are generally acquaintance of people who need the information. Marketers may have the motive of sales but generally reviewers do it only as a philanthropic initiative.

• It increases transparency as the customers becomes more knowledgeable and in turn more

Powerful.

The research around WoM marketing began as it became imperative for marketers to look at it as the most effective way of marketing entailing cheapest cost. It also increased customer loyalty and attracted new customers without incurring any further cost. We tried to study the conceptual analysis of word of mouth marketing with all the aspects within and outside the sphere of hospitality and tourism. It helped create an evidence based empirical base for further research in the study in tourism and hospitality sector. It was seen that it affected the many senses of consumer in various ways. The supporting evidence was taken from existing review of literature. Though the word of mouth marketing is a huge and diverse field, its implications in tourism is very interesting considering that research has found it to be very effective in comparison to any other service or product category. It helps in understanding the decision making criteria of tourists while zeroing in on a destination considering the alternatives. Various cognitive factors are touched by word of mouth marketing keeping in view equal and interesting alternatives. The comparison between the WoM marketing and other marketing in destination choice of tourists is worth studying.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Stakeholders in Tourism should pay special heed to this marketing form. They must keep themselves informed about the online reviews and ratings and try to improve themselves continuously. They must take online reviews as a feedback and improve on it as a part of quality management system.
2. Governments should establish reliable portals wherein reviews about individual departments including tourism can be made. The option of anonymity must be kept open.
3. There should be a mechanism of rating of ratings so that other people value or establish the quality of reviews.
4. Tourists must understand that the travel magazines have a scientific way of forming opinions and that lay reviews may contain inherent biases and problems.
5. Word of mouth marketing can be used by marketers as a promotional tool to ask for feedback, thus increasing their brand value.

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