

Social Media: An Effective Tool for Marketing of Tourism in Himachal Pradesh

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Abstract

As the use of social media is increasing day by day in the Indian Tourism Industry and majority of those active on it are reaping benefits, the need of the hour is to visualize, analyze and channelize the effects of Social Media Marketing to promote Tourism in Himachal Pradesh. The Present Paper is an attempt to map and explore Indian tourists' utilization of Web 1.0 and Web 2.0 information sources. It also highlights the influence of electronic social media on tourists and stakeholders. The study shows tourists' involvement in developing and sharing the virtual content. It critically analyzes technological arbitration through electronic word-of-mouth and engrossment factors related to virtual distribution of travel narratives. Moreover, the paper discusses information strength, hedonic aspects and functional values of tourist information in relation to communication aspects of the social media, in the context of holiday destination choices and online bookings.

Keywords: Web 2.0, Visual Content, Social Media, Electronic Word-Of-Mouth

Introduction

Marketing

The general perception about marketing is taken as a business activity; as a group of related business activities; as a trade phenomenon; as a frame of mind; as a coordinative and integrative function in policy making; as a sense of business purpose; as an economic process; as a structure of institutions; as the process of exchanging or transferring ownership of products; as a process of concentration, equalization and dispersion; as the creation

of time, place, and possession utilities, as a process of demand and supply adjustment; and as many other things (Marketing Staff of Ohio University 1965).

Kotler (1981) has defined the marketing concept as the key to achieving organizational goals consists in determining the needs and wants of target markets and delivering the desired satisfactions more effectively and efficiently than competitors. We can derive one such definition of marketing that touches human aspect and human behaviour. Marketing is human activity directed at satisfying needs and wants through exchange process. This definition stresses on satisfying human needs and wants through exchange process.

Social Web

In the context of the social web, Social media in marketing allows all customers to express and share an opinion or an idea somewhere along the business's path. Each contributing customer becomes part of the marketing department, as other customers read their comments or reviews. Thus engagement of consumers is then fundamental to successful social media marketing.

With the introduction of social media marketing, it has become increasingly important to gain customer interest which can ultimately interpreted into buying behavior. New online marketing concepts of engagement and loyalty have begun and aim to build customer participation and reputation.

Engagement in social media for the purpose of your social media plan is divided into two parts:

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1. Proactive posting of new content and conversations, as well as the sharing of content and information from others.
2. Reactive conversations with social media users responding to those who reach out to your social media profiles through commenting or messaging.

Traditional media is limited to one-way interaction with customers or 'push and tell' where only specific information is given to the customer without any mechanism to obtain customer feedback. On the other hand, social media is participative where customers are able to share their views on brands, products, and services. Traditional media gives the control of message to the marketer whereas social media shifts the balance to the consumer.

Social Media Marketing

Social Media Marketing explains "an interdisciplinary concept that uses the social media to attain organizational goals by generating value for stakeholders". Companies interact with various stakeholders through social media marketing, including potential customers, employees, journalists, bloggers and the general public. On a strategic level, social media marketing includes the management of the implementation, governance, scope (e.g. active or passive use) and the creation of a company's desired social media culture. This requires marketers to integrate user-generated content (earned media rather than the paid) into their strategic approach.

Objective

The objective of the present paper is to identify existing tourism, its profiles, patterns and to suggest how Information Technology tools and Social Media can be used more effectively to strategically market and promote Himachal Pradesh as a dream destination for every tourist.

Review of Literature

In 1999 Misner said that word-of-mouth marketing is, "the world's most effective, yet least understood marketing strategy" (Trusov, Bucklin, & Pauwels, 2009, p. 3). The more recent buzz of word-of-mouth marketing is due to the rise in use of social media and smart-phones. Businesses and marketers have noticed that, "a person's behaviour is influenced by many small groups" (Kotler, Burton, Deans, Brown, & Armstrong, 2013, p. 189). These small

groups rotate around social networking accounts that are run by influential people have followers of groups. The types of groups (followers) are called: 1. Reference groups: either face-to-face or have an indirect influence on a person's attitude or behaviour. 2. Membership groups: direct influence to a person's attitude or behaviour. 3. Aspirational groups: Groups, which an individual wishes to belong. Marketers target influential people on social media who are recognised as being opinion leaders and opinion formers to send messages to their target audiences. Marketers have come to the understanding that "consumers are more prone to believe in other individuals" (Sepp, Liljander, & Gummerus, 2011). OL's and OF's can also send their own messages about products and services they choose (Fill, Hughes, & De Francesco, 2013, p. 216). The reason the opinion leader or formers have such a strong following base is because their opinion is valued or trusted (Clement, Proppe, & Rott, 2007). They can review products and services for their followings, which can be positive or negative towards the brand. OL's and OF's are people who have a social status and because of their personality, beliefs, values etc. have the potential to influence other people (Kotler, Burton, Deans, Brown, & Armstrong, 2013, p. 189). They usually have a large amount of followers otherwise known as their reference, membership or aspirational group (Kotler, Burton, Deans, Brown, & Armstrong, 2013, p. 189). By having an OL or OF support a brands product by posting a photo, video or written recommendation on a blog, the following may be influenced and because they trust the OL/OF a high chance of the brand selling more products or creating a following base. Having an OL/OF helps spread word of mouth talk amongst reference groups and/or memberships groups e.g. family, friends, work-friends etc. (Kotler, Burton, Deans, Brown, & Armstrong, 2013, p. 189).

The adjusted communication model shows the use of using opinion leaders and opinion formers. The sender/source gives the message to many, many OL's/OF's who pass the message on along with their personal opinion, the receiver (followers/groups) form their own opinion and send their personal message to their group (friends, family etc.) (Dahlen, Lange, & Smith, 2010, p. 39).

Social Networking Websites

Social networking websites provide a platform to individuals and businessmen, allowing them to interact with each other and establish relationships

and communities online. This interaction can be more personal to users than traditional methods of outbound marketing and advertising. Networking sites act as a word of mouth or more precisely, e-word of mouth. The Internet, which has the power to connect billions of people across the world instantly, has given digital word of mouth a strong voice and farther reach. The ability to swiftly change purchasing patterns and product or service procurement and activity to an increasing number of consumers is referred to as an influence network. It is through social networking sites and blogs that people are able to “retweet” or “repost” comments made by others about a product being promoted online. More the message is repeated or shared online, more vigorously the reach of the product is widened. These websites basically build virtual communities that allow consumers to express their needs, wants and values. Social media marketing, thereafter, connects these consumers and audiences to businesses that share the same needs, wants and values.

The firms can stay in touch with individual followers through these networking sites on a regular basis. This kind of personal interaction can inculcate a feeling of loyalty in followers and potential customers. Moreover, by shortlisting whom to follow on these sites, companies can actually reach a very narrow target audience.

Social networking sites also include detailed information about products and services the potential customers may be interested in. By using new semantic analysis technologies, marketers can find out buying signals such as content shared by people and questions posted online. An understanding of buying signals can help marketers target relevant prospects and run micro-targeted campaigns.

In 2014, more than 80% of business executives acknowledged social media as an essential part of their business. Retailers have seen 133% increase in their revenues from social media marketing.

Trending Social Media Sites

Facebook

Facebook pages are much more detailed than Twitter handles. They let companies post videos, photos, and extensive descriptions and testimonials online and their followers are free to comment on the product pages. Facebook can linkback to the product’s Twitter page and dish out event reminders. As of May 2015, 93% of the

business marketers used Facebook to promote their brand and products.

A study from 2011 attributed 84% of “engagement” or clicks to Likes that linkback to Facebook advertising. But, by 2014, Facebook had restricted the content published from the pages of businesses and brands. Adjustments in Facebook algorithms have reduced the audience for non-paying business pages (that have at least 500,000 “Likes”) from 16% in 2012 to 2% in February 2014. As of August 2016, the total followers on the Facebook page of Himachal Tourism were 848.

Twitter

Twitter is a social networking service that enables companies to promote their products in brief messages known as tweets, which are limited to 140 characters and appear on the Home timelines of followers. Tweets can contain text, hashtags, photos, videos, animated GIF, emoji, or links to the product’s website and other social media profiles, etc. Many companies use Twitter to provide customer service. Some of them assure 24X7 support and answer all queries promptly, thus improving brand loyalty and gathering appreciation.

As of August 2016, the total followers on the Twitter page of Himachal Tourism were 5,408.

YouTube

YouTube is another famous platform for product and service promotion. Advertisements posted on this networking site are drafted keeping in mind the taste and style of the target audience and prospective clients. The language and ideas used to promote the product on YouTube reflect the audience’s preferences.

Another advantage YouTube offers to its advertisers is that ads are usually in sync with the content of the video requested. Certain ads are presented with certain videos because the content is relevant. For instance, if one is looking for a video showing best tourist places in Himachal, an advertisement by tour and travel companies holds relevance. Promotional opportunities such as sponsoring videos are also possible on YouTube. For example, a user who searches for a YouTube video on dog training may be showed a sponsored video from a dog toy company in results along with other videos. YouTube also enables publishers to earn money through its YouTube

Partner Program. As of August 2016, the Himachal Tourism on its YouTube page had a total of 12 videos and 329 subscribers, which is critically low if compared with the rest of the world.

Instagram

This social networking platform rapidly gained popularity, with more than 200 million active users as of May 2014. The user engagement rate of Instagram then was 15 times higher than that of Facebook and 25 times higher than that of Twitter. In case of brands and businesses, Instagram's ultimate aim is to facilitate companies' reach when it comes to their target audience with the help of captivating imagery in a rich and visual environment. Instagram also allows its users and companies to interact in public directly, making itself an ideal platform for firms to connect with their current and potential customers.

Many brands are now vigorously using this mobile app to give their visual marketing strategy a fillip. Instagram can be used to gain the necessary momentum required to capture the attention of the market segment that has an interest in the product or services being offered. As Instagram is supported by Apple and android system, it can be easily accessed by smartphone users. Thus, the marketers consider it a potential platform to expand their brands' exposure among the public, especially among the youth. Above all, marketers not only use social media for traditional Internet advertising, but they also encourage users to set a rage for a certain brand. This generally creates an opportunity for greater brand exposure. Moreover, marketers are also using the platform to drive social shopping and motivate people to collect and share pictures of their favorite products. Many major brands have already joined the movement. To name a few, Starbucks, MTV, Nike, Marc Jacobs and Red Bull multinationals have adopted the mobile photo application early.

Instagram has become an influential platform for marketers who reach out to their customers and target audience by sharing pictures and messages. According to a study by Simply Measured, 71% of the world's largest brands are now using the application as a marketing medium. For companies, Instagram can be used as a tool to connect and communicate with current and potential customers. A company can present a more personal picture of its brand, and by doing so it conveys a better and real picture of

itself. The purpose of uploading pictures on Instagram lies in on-the-go feel, a sense that the event is happening right now, and that adds another layer to the personal and accurate picture of the company. In fact, Thomas Rankin, co-founder and Chief Executive Officer of the program Dash Hudson, stated that when he approves a blogger's Instagram post before it is posted on the behalf of a brand his company represents, his only negative feedback is if it looks too posed. "It's not an editorial photo," he explained, "We're not trying to be a magazine. We're trying to create a moment."

Another facility Instagram offers to companies is making use of the user-generated contents through hashtags. Besides the filter and hashtag functions, Instagram's 15-second videos and the facility of sharing private messages have offered new opportunities to companies in terms of connecting with customers in a novel way, further promoting effective marketing on the application. As of August 2016, total followers on the Instagram page of Himachal Tourism were 14.

LinkedIn

LinkedIn, a business-oriented networking service, lets companies create professional profiles of themselves and their business to connect with others in their field. By using widgets, users can promote their social networking activities, such as Twitter stream or blog entries of their product pages, onto their LinkedIn profile page. It gives them a chance to generate sales leads and look for business partners. Like Facebook, business owners can use "Company Pages" on LinkedIn to create an area that will enable them to promote their products or services and interact with their customers. With the increasing risk of emails sent to job seekers being spammed, leading companies are turning to LinkedIn for recruitment purposes instead of using a separate job portal. Further, companies have expressed preference to garnering maximum information from a LinkedIn profile as compared to a limited email.

Google+

Google+ integrates a user's profile with the Google search engine apart from providing pages and some features of Facebook. Other Google products that are also integrated include Google AdWords and Google Maps. With the development of Google Personalized Search and other

location-based search services, Google+ provides targeted advertising methods, navigation services and other forms of location-based marketing. It can also be helpful in other digital marketing campaigns and social media marketing. Google+ authorship was known to have substantial benefit on a website's search engine optimization before the relationship was removed by Google. It is one of the fastest-growing social media networks and can be of great help to almost all businesses.

Blogs

Several online platforms create an environment for companies and clients to connect instantly with ease. Companies that identify the need for information, originality and accessibility hire bloggers to promote their products as unique and finally reach out to consumers who are active on the social media.

Latest studies show that consumers see coverage in the media and blogs as more neutral and reliable than advertisements in the print media, which are not thought of as free or independent. Blogs allow a company to provide longer and detailed descriptions of products or services and include testimonials and links to and from other social networking sites and blog pages. Blogs can be updated frequently and are promotional techniques to retain existing customers and acquire followers and subscribers who can later be routed to social network pages.

Online communities can help a particular business to reach the clients of other businesses through the social networking platform. To help companies analyze their current position in the corporate world, websites enable employees to place evaluations of their companies online. Some businesses opt out of integrating social media platforms into their traditional marketing regimen. While communicating online, users need to stick to certain corporate standards. To gain profit in a business-consumer relationship, companies should keep in mind four key assets that consumers look for - information, involvement, community and control.

Research Methodology

To achieve the above mentioned objective of this research paper, primary as well as secondary data has been taken from Shimla and Manali which are the top two places in the state that receives the most number of domestic as well

as foreign tourists from all across the globe. Secondary data has been collected from books, academic journals, and papers from professional bodies, research institutes, online articles and tourism related websites. The research technique that has been used in the paper is survey i.e., questionnaire. A random sample technique is selected for data collection. The sample size chosen for research is two hundred persons which includes tourists and tourism entrepreneurs.

Data Analysis

Occupation

Thirty five percent of the respondents are tourism entrepreneurs, sixty five percent of respondents are tourists. The total sample size was segmented into two different types (Tourists and Travel entrepreneurs). The target respondents are more concerned with social media and its role in making travel plans to the outstations with the help of internet.

Which source of Information do you use to keep yourself updated about the various Travel Destinations?

Table 1.1 reflects the opinion of the respondents on the basis of the source they use to get the information about travel destinations.

Table 1.1: Classification of Respondents According to Source of Information Used

Sr. No.	Source of Information Used	No. of Respondents		Total
		Shimla	Manali	
1.	Internet	92 (92.0%)	84 (84.0%)	176 (88%)
2.	Newspaper	2 (2.0%)	8 (8.0%)	10 (5.0%)
3.	Television	4 (4.0%)	6 (6.0%)	10 (5.0%)
4.	Radio	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)
5.	Marketing Campaigns	2 (2.0%)	2 (2.0%)	4 (2.0%)
	Total	100 (100%)	100 (100%)	200 (100%)

Fisher's Exact Test =4.396, p-value=.232

Source: Composed by researcher from primary data collected through questionnaire

It is clear from the table 1.1 that for majority of the respondents (88.0%) the major source of information

about the various travel destinations is Internet. While 5% of the tourists rely on newspaper and 5% depends on television for the same. These findings depict that for majority of the tourists, Internet plays an integral role to get the update knowledge of tourism destinations.

What is your preferred Source to purchase a travel product e.g. Air/Rail/Bus Tickets or a Hotel/Restaurant etc.?

Tourists now use online purchase as a tool for shopping of travel products instead buying them from traditional sellers, as is evident from the table 1.2.

Table 1.2: Classifying Respondents on the Basis of Tools used for Purchasing Travel Products

Sr. No.	Preferred Source	No. of Respondents				Total
		Shimla		Manali		
1.	Online Purchase	64	(64.0%)	25	(25.0%)	68 (34.0%)
2.	By Travel Agent	19	(19.0%)	26	(26.0%)	34 (17.0%)
3.	Reservation Counters	12	(12.0%)	34	(34.0%)	78 (39.0%)
4.	Telephonic Reservation	04	(4.0%)	12	(12.0%)	16 (8.0%)
5.	Others	01	(1.0%)	03	(3.0%)	4 (2.0%)
	Total	100	(100%)	100	(100%)	200 (100.0%)

Source: Composed by researcher from primary data collected through questionnaire

Table 1.2 depict interesting findings, whereas maximum number (39.0%) of respondents still use reservation counters for ticket bookings, but (34.0%) of them use online purchase of various travel products.

Do you think promoting Himachal Tourism using Social media marketing tools can boost tourism in the state?

It is heartening to observe that majority of the respondents believe that if himachal Pradesh is promoted by using social media marketing tools it will give a boost to the tourism in the state.

It is evident from the table 1.3 that more than 2/3rd of the total tourists believes that promoting Himachal Pradesh with the help of social media marketing tools will give boos to tourism of the state. The social media will definitely multiply the current target market which will help in generating more tourists towards the state.

Table 1.3: Classifying Respondents on the Basis of usage of Social Media Marketing Tools for Boosting Tourism in State

Sr. No.	Using Social Media Marketing Tools will give boost to tourism in the state	No. of Respondents				
		Shimla		Manali		Total
1.	Yes	91	(91.0%)	64	(64.0%)	
2.	No	2	(2.0%)	27	(27.0%)	29 (14.5%)
3.	Can't say	7	(7.0%)	9	(9.0%)	16 (8.0%)
	Total	100	(100%)	100	(100%)	200 (100.0%)

Source: Composed by researcher from primary data collected through questionnaire

Is Information Technology providing accurate, reliable information about tourist destinations you intend to visit?

58% of the respondents are agreeing up on the following statement, 32% of the respondents are neither agree nor disagree upon the following statement.

Conclusion & Recommendations

Latest improvements in technology attracts lot of inbound tourists. For strategic marketing of Tourism in state the primary objective should be Social Media Marketing and usage of latest IT tools. Implementation of various mobile applications related to travel industry is needed. The tourists have to feel security to use online portals, implementation of secure payment gateway is mandatory. The Department of Tourism should have their separate travel website and social media marketing pages, adequate marketing is necessary to make the tourist aware about our travel product i.e. Himachal Pradesh.

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