LINK BETWEEN TOURIST DESTINATION CHOICES AND SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCE

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

Social media platforms over time have turned out to be a key factor when tourists decide an appropriate tourism destination. Social media is being extensively utilized by people for a variety of reasons and one of the reasons being sharing travel related experiences and pictures. These experiences and pictures and then viewed by thousands of others who base their decision for choosing an appropriate tourist destination on such information derived from social media. The purpose of this research is to understand how social media platforms such as Tripadvisor, Facebook and Instagram can influence decision-making amongst tourists while selecting a tourist destination. Gaining and in-depth insight about the topic, in tandem with issues pertaining to it would be vital in not only contextualizing but also shaping the review.

Concepts and Definitions

Tourism

It has been stated by Drbrambed karcollege (2021), the notion of tourism was defined by E. Freuler in 1905 based on a modern sense for the pressing need to get a change in regular scenario. In the same vein, tourism was defined by Hunziker and Krapf (1942), as the sum total of a relation and phenomena that arose from travel and stay of people who were not native, such that it did not lead to them residing permanently nor associating with any revenue generating activities. A wider definition of the term tourism was formulated by the International Academy of Science, Engineering and Technology (IASET), along with the tourism society in Cardiff. They state that tourism can be defined vis-à-vis particular activities through choice and executed

away from the environment at home. In addition, tourism may or may not be inclusive of an individual going on an overnight stay (Sunil K. Kabia, 2005) .

Tourist

A tourist can be defined as an essential element within the tourism sector. Everything boils down to the human factor that forms the essence within the sector of tourism. Therefore, a tourist emerges as a key player within tourism (John Tribe, 2009).

While the origins of the term tourist can be retraced back to more than two centuries past, there is no universal agreement as to the definition of a tourist (Cohen, 2001). A commonly and extensively accepted definition of tourist was put together by the World Tourism Organization and was executed for technical as well as statistical purposes. Nonetheless, such a definition does not take into account many domains and influence of the tourism sector.

Social Media

As such, social media refers to an assortment of internet based applications which are developed on the ideological and technological foundations of web 2.0, and those that facilitate the exchange and development of user-generated content. A similar logic was embraced by Chisenga and Chande-Mallya (2012), who defined social media as a novel online media platform that has many common attributes of web 2.0. Putting it simply, social media leverages web-based technologies to build interactive platforms that users and communities use to transfer, modify, discuss and co-create content (Kietzmann et al., 2011).

Travel and Communication

Given that travel is a common activity, a change was witnessed with regards to how

travel was planned and associated communication owing to the introduction of the internet. Before the internet, tourists mostly depended on experiences of other individuals or through their interactions with traditional tourism organizations that helped them to choose a tentative tourist destination (Wee et al., 2013). Communication models were modified with the advent of the internet with more emphasis now on virtual communication as compared to face-to-face. In the present day, tourists now not only acquire information but also purview pictures on social media which helps them to plan their travel.

The Rise of Social Media

It all started with the 'bulletin board system' (BBS) that facilitated interactions amongst people, while sharing news, messages or information. BBS referred to a board that was thematically segregated, allowing internet users to start chats based on their likings and interests. With further technological developments, there is a huge variation on information sharing on

social media as compared to BBS, given that boards of these kinds indicated an evolution in virtual communication (Korenich et al., 2013).

Influence of Social Media on Travel

Social media is being extensively leveraged by tourists to seek, share, organize, and interpret individual stories associated with travel wherein their experiences are shared through blogs (Leung et al., 2013). In fact, social media makes quite an impact in offering detailed information to tourists about potential travel destinations as compared to obtaining information from other sources (Liu et al., 2020). Ultimately, it has been observed that social media has modified the way tourists seek, obtain, read, trust and produce information pertaining to tourism destinations (Sigala et al., 2012).

Nevertheless, tourist exploitation is rampant and this is attributed to promotion, marketing and with the purpose of improving brand image. Thus, it can be implied that social media content cannot be entirely relied upon particularly when the organization or individual posting the content has a commercial agenda (Leung et al., 2013). There is high possibility for such instances to occur when there is an involvement of famous personalities or prominent travel bloggers, which makes it challenging for users to define the authenticity of the content or information.

Tourists and their Decision-Making Behaviour

A study conducted by De Souza and Costa Machado (2017), explored the manner in which social media was used while planning a travel. Based on the findings from their study, it was indicated that travellers used social media during each and every phase of planning as a credible information source. At the same time, another study carried out by Sahin and Sengun (2015), to get an idea about the importance of social media on tourism marketing. The findings revealed that social media held tremendous potential to make a positive as well as negative impact on the tourism sector, and people belonging to the younger generation were largely impacted by social media generated information.

Research conducted by Li (2016), indicated that there was a high probability for tourists to leverage social media at the time of planning their trips.

This was particularly true for tourists who were desirous of going on trips to overseas locales. In addition, it was observed by Li (2016), tourists use social media not only for extracting information but also for perusing recommendations and testimonials related to tourism destinations. Similarly, it was posited by Pike (2015), many modern travellers were well-versed with technology and around 85 per cent of possible tourists relied on the internet as well as social media for information. Likewise, (Minazzi, 2015) suggested that the origin of travel preparation begins from an internal need to obtain a unique travel experience by travelling to a specific location. An aspect that is of importance was that, because of their internal or external stimuli could be both, such an internal need might emerge. Therefore, it was repeated by Minazzi (2015), that the focus of visitors was on meeting their needs, which took place by concentrating on identifying the location that had a greater potential to satiate all their travel related needs.

Many facets pertaining to social media like; dependability, reliability and trustworthiness were noticed to be significant as far as a tourist's decision-making was concerned. It was observed by Liu et al. (2020), that tourists were highly trustful when they received tourism related information through a website offering traveling reviews. Apart from trustworthiness, other aspects related to social media's influence on tourism was evaluated by researchers and scholars in the past comprised of credibility or reliability. On this basis, a major concern that researchers expressed pertained to whether travel and tourism consumers viewed social media as a resource that was trustworthy and reliable tool while planning for a tour (Caldito et al., 2015). Caldito et al. (2015) observed that a majority of travellers viewed social media as a credible resource which offered them with a variety of beneficial information which allowed them to plan their travel.

Social Media and Decision-Making

Consumer behaviour, influenced by social media has been extensively deliberated in the domain of tourism and travels, given the intangible nature of travel related services and the probable risks at the time of arriving at travel related decisions (Minazzi, 2015). Several studies have investigated tourists intention for using social media (Kim et al., 2021; Öz, 2015; Stojanovic et al., 2018), and its influence on information searches associated with travel (Tran &

Hue Do, 2016), intention and attitude to make a purchase (Kaperonis, 2018), and decisions associated with travel. The widespread influx and significance of social media for various aspects related to decision-making among tourists indicate the essentiality for holistic and in-depth understanding about the role which social media plays during information searches by tourists and processes related to decision-making (Matikiti-Manyevere & Kruger, 2019). Though it is not much, there are studies that have used qualitative techniques in investigating the impact from social media on tourists' decision-making behaviour. Studies from the past mostly concentrated on investigating the way through which tourists are known to adopt and process information extracted from online reviews (Filieri, 2016). A detailed qualitative study regarding the influence of social media on hotel related decision-making behaviour of consumers was executed by Varkaris and Neuhofer (2017), where it focused mainly on evaluation stage where search of information and choice of social media took place. Liu et al. (2020) executed an investigation, to get an idea about strategies on social media that practitioners used within the travel and tourism sector. Though the scope of social media for impacting a five-stage process of decision-making processes of tourists involving (recognizing need, information search, analysis of substitutes, purchase decision and post-purchase behaviour) was stressed upon. Nonetheless, the study did not offer much in terms of contribution for getting an understanding about actual social media use of tourists and how it impacted each stage of the decision-making process.

A study executed by Narangajavana Kaosiri et al. (2019), has been deemed as one of the first studies to touch upon the topic of social media's role while investigating the part played by user-generated content (UGC) websites while planning for travel, as compared to information obtained through other sources. The findings from their study indicated that social media was extensively utilized for choosing locations, and was also used for obtaining information about accommodations and potential tourist attractions after reaching a destination. Research usually supports the claim that UGC is largely perceived in the same perspective as information acquired offline like; word-of-mouth or recommendations, but at the same time offering an original, enjoyable, updated and credible information in comparison with other content offered by marketers or sources controlled by marketers (Liang et al., 2020).

Tiganj and Aleri (2013) adopted a case study method to investigate the role played by social media regarding marketing in the domain of hospitality, while emphasizing on online communication and distribution based on marketer created content. Options pertaining to crisis management and the role of social media in decision-making procedures of international tourists during a crisis while traveling, was investigated by Schroeder and Pennington-Gray (2015). From their findings, it was revealed that international tourists had the propensity to resort to social media for information about the crisis, which would be associated with their travel experience and risk perceptions.

Research Gap

Research conducted in the past have pointed at various roles that social media plays in terms of a consumer's decision-making process during the various phases of their travels. Regardless of the current utilization of social media during the phase of decision-making, studies previously conducted often began with the phase where information search occurred. It is evident that there is a need for research pertaining to tourism to examine the extent to which social media would play several roles over the many phases and the way in which customers are influenced while selecting a travel destination. In addition, a large number of studies in this sector have explored the impact of particular platforms of social media on the decision-making process. Therefore, there is a lack of studies that examine how specific social media platforms like Tripadvisor, Facebook and Instagram influence decision-making. This apparent gap in existing research will be bridged through this research.

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