
Editorial: social networks as driver of tourism marketing

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The growth of internet-based social media in the 21st century has prompted one personal communications as a driver of global business and leisure and tourism industry is not an exception to this development. Tourism and leisure being a customised market segment socialisation of business has appeared as an effective marketing tool for the firms. Most companies also get connected to social media platforms on the internet and offer opportunities to share consumer experience. Thus, the impact of consumer-to-consumer communications has been greatly manifested in the marketplace. It has emerged out of several corporate experiences that social media is a hybrid element of the promotion mix because in a traditional sense it enables companies to interact to their customers, while in a non-traditional sense it enables customers to interact directly among the peers. The content, timing, and frequency of the social media-based conversations occurring between consumers are often beyond the control of a firm as the communication process takes its independent interactive path in the social media (Rajagopal, 2011). This stands in contrast to the traditional integrated marketing communications paradigm whereby a high degree of control is present. Therefore, firms must learn to shape consumer discussions in a manner that is consistent with the organisation's mission and performance goals. Methods by which this can be accomplished include providing consumers with networking platforms, and using blogs, social media tools, and promotional tools to engage customers (Mangold and Faulds, 2009).

Most companies have driven lots of friends and followers on social platforms such as Facebook and few have succeeded in generating profits there. This is because they merely deploy their digital strategies into social environments by broadcasting their commercial messages or seeking customer feedback. However, firms need to develop social strategies that are consistent with consumers' expectations and behaviour as over a period people want to connect with other people but not with companies. The successful social

strategies are those that reduce search costs or increase customers' willingness to get associated with the company and its brands through the various social media platforms. The challenge faced by many companies is apparently the way to be active in social media as most firms do not have clear understanding as how to manage the social networks effectively and what performance indicators they should be measuring, and how they should measure them. Further, as companies develop social media strategies, platforms such as YouTube, Facebook, and Twitter are too often treated as stand-alone elements rather than part of an integrated system. Firms should invest in building strategies in a systematic way to understand and conceptualise online social media, as an ecosystem of related elements involving both digital and traditional media (Hanna et al., 2011).

The collaboration and networking platforms are empowering employees, customers and partners to be active participants in the global conversation of the Command. Social media tools and platforms provide an effective communications channel for the customer centric business communication and across the organisation as a transparent knowledge sharing initiative. Firms must establish a process for delivering the voice of truth through right communication in social media platforms by disseminating authentic, trusted and believable information. This reinforces the idea that social media can be promoted by the firms as a tool not only to voice ideas and concerns but also to get accurate and credible solutions on various issues of consumers.

This issue of the journal includes six academic articles encompassing the topics tourism websites, customer satisfaction in hospitality industry, managing negative word of mouth, heritage tourism, eco-tourism, and travel experience on coastal roads. All these articles discuss social media and network marketing at the core of their arguments. Although unofficial media may not create enough marketing drive or intend to attract tourists, they can increase tourism and influence expectations of a destination. Investigations into how tourists use the media and how prior media exposure affects satisfaction with the destination could be an important resource for cities attempting to expand their tourism industry, target a new population or change their destination's image (Bordelon and Dimanche, 2012).

We hope that the articles in this issue would enhance knowledge on the role of social media in leisure and tourism industry. These papers would certainly contribute to the existing literature and enable future research on the subject.

References

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