Social Media in Tourism

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Introduction

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.

Social media has seen exponential growth during the past several years. By December 2012, around 56% of people use social media, almost everybody (totally 98%) aged 18-24 year olds already use social media. The leading social media currently being Facebook has now over 1.2 billion members [1].

Role of Social Media in Tourism

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 [2] and tourism promotion [3-6] 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 [3]. Many countries regard social media as an important tool to promote their tourism industries. Tourism Australia is encouraging the Australian tourism industry to positively embrace social media in promoting their tourism business or region using social media to the tourism industry.

There have been challenges in using social media in tourism. Different countries and businesses have different realities regarding the social media used for tourism management. On one hand, the importance of online marketing has not been fully recognised in tourism management [14]. It is estimated that only 1.55 percent of the total destination media expenditure was spent on Internet advertising in 2008 [15]. In 2010, only 28% of travel agencies in Asia-Pacific region were using social media [16]. On the other hand, the tourism industry is generally facing great challenges in managing social media moving forward, such as developing a clear and measurable strategy, demonstrating the viable return of investment and integrating social media into business processes [17].

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Compared with the exponential growth of social media used in tourism, related studies seem to lag behind with regard to either the volume of literature or the broadness of research topics. There have been few quantitative studies on the impact of social media in tourism, compared with most of current studies focusing on qualitative explorations. Therefore, the future study will have to provide solid evidence to demonstrate the positive contribution of social media to tourist numbers, perspectives or location positive image, or economic

Discussion

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 [10,11]. However, it remains as a question whether social media can really drive conversion in the tourism industry and boost the number and length of visits, as well as visitor satisfaction and number of return visits. An interesting example is Queensland Tourism’s ”Best Job in the World” campaign. This ”one of the most successful tourism campaigns ever” attracted over 7 million visitors 200 000 new visitors in just a few short weeks of the campaign to its website. Despite all this, the number of international holidaymakers travelling to Queensland actually dropped by 8% in the 2008-09 financial year [12]. Although lot of reasons were behind, an imperfect integration of multiple components of marketing strategy was believed to be a key issue. It taught us to use social media as part of integrated marketing strategy.

Conrad Advertising investigated the influence of social media on holiday booking and suggested that social media presence is influential but cannot drive short-term sales, and the impact of social media on tourism management might be less important than it has been thought [13]. Currently it lacks of solid evidence derived from econometric analysis to demonstrate a positive economic contribution of social media to the tourism industry.

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return of investment in social media usage of tourism industry. Economic studies need to be advocated and encouraged. Notably, almost all of current studies employ a micro approach, focusing only on specific aspects of the issue such as specific social media type, specific application and at specific travel planning or decision-making process stage [2]. Obviously, there is a need of a comprehensive macro approach to explore the overall impact and role of social media, focusing equally on each stage of the travel planning process, and attempting to cover all stages of the decision making process.

Conclusions

Social media continues to grow. It increasingly influences on many social and economic aspects.

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. Social media plays a very important role in the tourism industry.

Research on social media in tourism is still in infancy. While case studies focusing on qualitative discussion of the impact of social media in tourism are needed, it is critical to encourage the comprehensive investigation into the influence and impact of social media on all aspects of tourism industry, and to demonstrate the economic contribution of social media to the industry.

References

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