

The impact of social media: advantages or disadvantages

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Abstract

The role and use of social media in travellers' decision making and tourism operations and management are widely discussed. The strategic importance of social media are high for tourism competitiveness. Slow progress are made by the industry in responding to business opportunities by social media. The online world is rapidly evolving and some companies may embrace new technologies due to the pressure to be digital but are not thinking about what it means to the business in a virtual environment. Theoretically, the increasing significance and attention of social media in tourism was coined as the growing number of articles was found over the past years. There are some challenges of intellectual property and data control for the development and dissemination of social-media-sources-involved. The phenomenon of social networking and the development of social media (web-based and mobile technologies that turn text communications into active dialog) has been the most dramatic development in the information age over recent years. Citizen Journalists (individuals who tweet opinions and comments on the internet for others to see) need to be aware that they could be subject to law suits.

Keywords: Social media, consumers, tourism, intellectual property and communication



Introduction

Social media and Web2.0 are two popular buzzwords as well as technological concepts, which have brought about persuasive changes in business-to-business communication, business-to-customer communication, and customer-to-customer communication (Kietzmann, Hermkens, McCarthy and Silvestre, 2011). The aim of this article, as shown in Figure 1, is to show the current state of the art of the studies of social media applied to the

tourism sector with the main objective of providing a solid academic foundation on which to base the intention to develop practical application: a model based on innovation, which involves the application of a new marketing method, significant changes in product design positioning and promotion, which allows a better way to meet consumer needs, to open new markets or to position tourist products in a new way attracting more visitors to “consume in a tourism way” a destination.

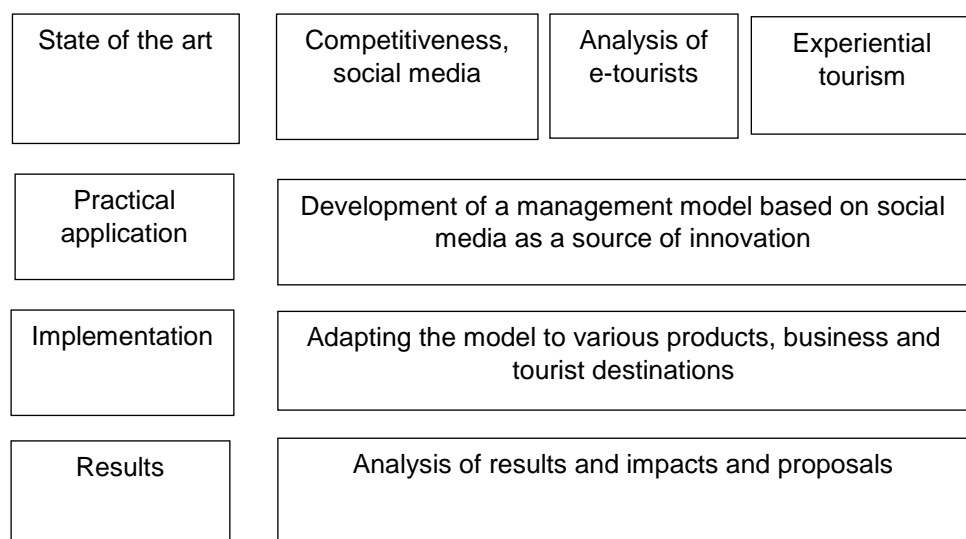


Fig. 1. Research Scheme.

To develop the state of the art model we have followed several lines of research:

1. Firstly, one focused on the competitiveness, innovation and social networks of the tourism industry as a source of innovation.
2. Secondly, we have identified the factors, variables and characteristics that define the so-called e-tourist, focused on the study of the traveller life cycle.
3. Finally, the consideration of current tourism as a tourism experience focused on experiential products, adding the experience as a fourth economic value added to services as once this were added to products and they themselves were added to inputs.

After setting up the conceptual framework, we have developed a theoretical model whose practical application has been adapted to various products and tourism businesses to verify the results of the model, and where it is possible to improve it.

Competitiveness, Innovation and Social Media

The development of the model is based essentially on the concepts of causes and dynamics of competitiveness in business. In the implementation of these concepts to the tourism industry we have considered some of the peculiarities that characterise tourism, specially, the intangibility of the services offered, the increasing information content and the interdependence between different

companies or organizations involved to provide unique product or service.

Driven by user-generated content-including the ability to share photos, videos, and comments with other readers-academic scholars also noted the capacity of social media in helping tourism and hospitality companies to engage potential guests, increase their online presence, and thereby lead to greater online revenues. Wang and Fesenmaier (2004) illustrated that social media are useful for managing customer relations with their unique ability of attracting customers through in-depth, focused, and member-generated content, engaging customers through social interactions, and retaining customers through relation building with other members who are online.

The authors considered the development of a model in the following concepts:

1. In the current situation, companies and organizations must compete in a global environment by supporting themselves on the international networking and responding simultaneously to local demand.
2. Competitiveness is based on the capacity of being updated, on the flexibility and the innovation of organizations, companies and destinations.
3. Innovation applied to tourism, given the specificities discussed above, involves a mix of changes in the product, the distribution, the marketing and even business organization or destinations.

More than thirty percent of South Africans connect to the internet every day, making the environment one of the main sources of information and a great influence in making purchasing decisions, as well as establishing it as a major mean of interpersonal contact (<http://blog.webafrica.co.za/general/latest-statistics-south-african-internet-penetration/>).

Internet and New Consumer Habits in the Tourism Sector

One of the habits that is steadily growing in our society, which was essentially unthinkable years ago, is purchasing over the Internet and, interestingly, services related to Tourism and Leisure are those that are the most demanded. Surveys showed that while on the Internet, buyers buy tickets (plane, train, boat, bus, etc.), some purchase hosting services and others services related to leisure and spare time activities. As evidenced by the EGM data [8], the areas related to Tourism and Leisure are no strangers to the Internet, but on the contrary, are one of the fastest sectors that have adapted their distribution channels and information to users who increasingly use the network. There is a rapid growth and consolidation of Internet use when planning vacations especially in major tourist source markets. Internet accounts more facilities for the user in the process of organizing and purchasing your holiday. Tourists can avoid intermediaries and contact hotels directly through Internet. In addition, travel agents have also adapted and use the network as a marketing channel through its Web pages. In this sense, it is important to note that, by virtue of using the Internet, visitors do not arrive in South Africa without reservation, but the network opens a wide range of facilities for tourists to manage their bookings. The Internet plays an increasingly important role in the tourism value chain.

The Internet is a dynamic medium, so that users, companies and institutions must adapt and continually recycle. The Internet model that exists today has nothing to do with the one that existed five years ago. Five years from now we will certainly see one that has nothing to do with the current one. Despite the wide adoption of social media by both tourism consumers and suppliers in recent years (Chung and Buhalis, 2008; Leung, Lee and Law, 2011), the successful practice of manipulating and managing social media still remains largely unknown to practitioners and scholars. In view of the increasing importance of social media the

primary research question of this study is "What have tourism researchers previously done with regard to the use of social media?" Providing an agenda for future research on social media and hospitality is another contribution to the academia as well as industry.

To understand what Web 2.0 is we must review a bit of history. The 1990s can be seen as the decade of the emergence of the Internet, when Web pages first appeared, and the so-called "dot com" emerged. It was in the year 2000 when e-commerce consolidated, a B2C (Business to Consumer) transaction model, under which companies can still offer their products directly to consumers without intermediaries. The majority of Web pages of tourism companies, and even institutional ones, quickly adapted to this system by B2C booking systems that allow users to manage their own holidays.

In the 1990s and early 2000s, we discerned a change in the Internet model, where the user becomes more prominent, especially in tourism, where they can conceive and organize their own vacations. However, in recent years there have been a number of tools, such as blogs, YouTube or different social networks that have a common feature: the socialization and active participation of users who are part of them. That is, by using these tools users share, choose and modify the information that most interests

them, communicate, socialize and participate in a conversation that takes place on the Internet. These tools, independently, have revolutionized the existing Internet model, a vertical one, giving more power to users a laying the foundations for the creation of a new Internet model that has been named Web 2.0. But this is not something new and absolutely not a miraculous marketing solution. In fact, Web 2 was born as O'Reilly and MediaLive International (Dougherty, CRAIG; 2004Cline) used such name for the "Web 2.0 Conference" dealing developments and innovations of the Web.

In short, Web 2.0 is the evolution of the Internet that has taken place in the last few years thanks to the emergence of tools that allow users to socialize, share information and chat on the Internet, what from now on we will call "Social Media".

E-Tourism Needs

Given the emergence and prevalence of social media among the customers, it is no longer enough for businesses in tourism to rely solely on traditional media for marketing. Through the travel process, the e-visitor has the same needs as any other tourist. However, the main feature of the e-tourist is the use of the tools that Web 2.0 offers in each stage of the journey, as illustrated in the figure below:

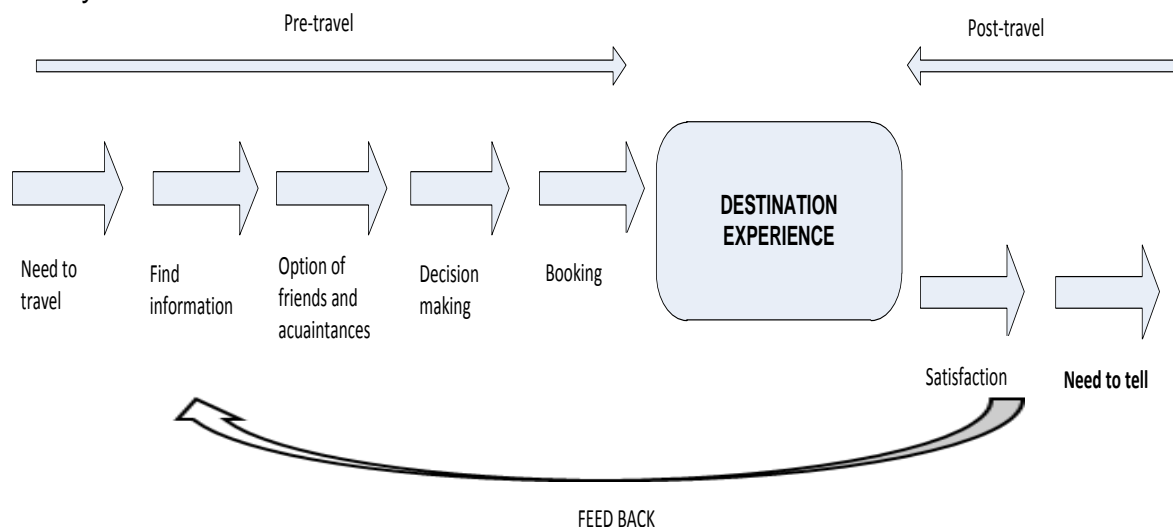


Fig. 2. Travel experience process.

The value chain starts with the decision and trip planning, pre-trip: the need to travel arises, "At this point the e-tourist looks for information on the market that best suit his needs. In addition, the opinions of family and friends are doubled by the opinions that he may have read about the destination or product in forums or sites specialized in tourism 2.0. Once all the alternatives are evaluated, the consumer will select the one that best meets his needs and make all the arrangements that will result in the final booking. Finally, at this stage, the consumer must be prepared to organize and conduct the final preparations of the trip. While the tourist is at a destination, the main travel experience occurs, that is, all those events that the person lives as a result of having felt, sensed, or seeing something. This phase involves all leisure services that complement the travel experience. In the last phase, namely the post-travel phase, the satisfaction with the travel experience is evaluated. The e-tourist is not satisfied only with having lived the experience, but uses the 2.0 websites to tell us about his experience and publish his thoughts and opinions on a particular destination or tourist service that he received. With this, the e-tourist is not just a tourist who uses the internet for travel, but becomes a prescriber and offers feedback in the process to future e-tourists. The democratization of the Internet has meant that users are those who upload videos and photos to the web

(YouTube and Flickr), who share information and are connected through social networks (Facebook, or Tripadvisor), who believe information (Wikipedia), who become journalists (blogs), in short, those with the power of the network. Web 2.0 allows users with common interests to find a meeting and participation space. In this sense, many Social Media have been themed on tourism and travel allowing users to share information on for example. their holidays, destinations and attractions to visit, recommended accommodations and restaurants, and to meet other people travelling and organizing holidays. In fact, many companies, destinations and attractions aware of this new reality are already present, in one way or another, in the Social Media and Web 2.0. In summary, we face a new arena of marketing opportunities for destinations, businesses and tourism resources for the time being used in an incipient manner, and to some extent, intuitive. As part of this research, internet, Web 2. and other participatory media create a suitable context to encourage word-of-mouth on the Internet and sharing of experiences during the holidays. Blogs, Forums, Social Networks in general and themed leisure and tourism networks, YouTube, etc., are tools that allow visitors to share their experiences in the network so as to encourage positive visibility of a product, service or tourist destinations anywhere across the globe.

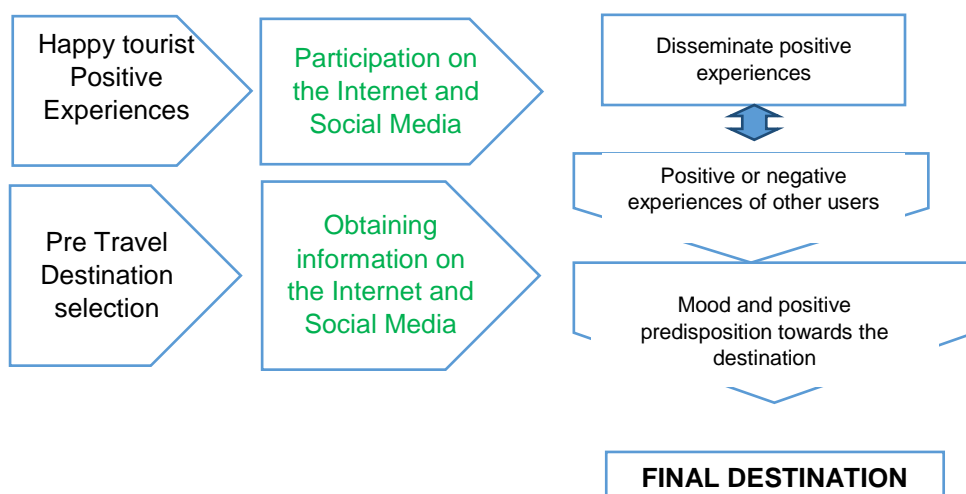


Fig. 3. The value chain of the importance of experience and influence in the organizational phase of the holiday.

The above figure illustrates the value chain of the importance of experiences and influence in the organizational phase of the holiday.

Experiential Tourism

The engines of this new experiential tourism are the information society (with technology, rationalism, physical comfort and rational intelligence), intermixed with dream society (values, emotions, spiritual comfort and emotional intelligence).

The new demand of the XXI century, therefore, is looking for channels to live immersive experiences. The key is to transform the passive client into an active guest, or, as it is beginning to be known, the consumers. This implies that the industrial structure where professionals produce and amateurs consume has expired for a two-way market where everyone can be in any field. It is believed that leisure 2.0 has led to the disappearance of the boundary line separating the consumer and the producer, inciting the former to co-participate in the production process.

The economic value before services were sought. Now, what tourists want to buy are experiences and stories. Tourists not only look for resting and relax, but want to satisfy the emotional pyramid. The trend we see now in tourism is towards "personalization". It calls for a tailor made service.

Social Media Applications in Communication

It is important to recognise that social media is first and foremost a social platform. Travel firms need to recognise how their own primary customer is using the tools and adapt their marketing to match their customer needs.

In the area of social media, a shift in the communication approach of companies has occurred, away from pushing things out toward enticing consumers to putting things into companies in order to create a fully interactive and mutually beneficial

relationship (Li and Wang, 2011). Since customer engagement is critical to mutual communication via social media and because of the lack of interaction, anything can affect the ultimate success of social media that is used.

In the business services field, as solving business problems often requires collaboration and communication among people, social media can help businesses communicate and gather customer input on future strategies and products (Jonassen, Howland, Moore and Marra, 2003).

Starbucks is an example where Starbucks customers are able to suggest ideas:

"You know better than anyone else what you want from Starbucks. So tell us. What's your Starbucks Idea? Revolutionary or simple – we want to hear it. Share your ideas, tell us what you think of other people's ideas and join the discussion. We're here, and we're ready to make ideas happen. Let's get started" (My Starbucks idea).

By communicating with customers through different social media applications, the destinations or companies could gain insights relating to their competitive advantage and customer perfection. With social media can not only tourism suppliers achieve a better understanding of what consumers want and how they perceive their companies, customers' comments and opinions can also highlight areas of improvement and enable suppliers to protect their brand and images.

Impacts on Tourism Culture and Knowledge

Social media is changing the global tourism culture. Common themes emerged from social media research, such as conceptualisation of connection and disconnection, the impact of technologies on the traditional physical spaces of backpacker' social interaction, and the increasing fluidity between "tourists" and "non-tourists" experiences (Zeng and

Gerritsen, 2014). The environment of tourism is going to change through the influence of social media. Social media use can also contribute to tourism knowledge creation. Online networking positively contributes to information sharing, knowledge creation and idea generation capabilities of peer-to-peer virtual communities. Social media also becomes a useful research tool when conducting academic studies on tourism related issues. Using social media in tourism education is also an emerging topic, because the main users of social media on Facebook, are for example, students.

Intellectual Property and Data Control

There are some challenges of intellectual property and data control for the development and dissemination of social-media-sources-involved. The phenomenon of social networking and the development of social media (web-based and mobile technologies that turn text communications into active dialog) has been the most dramatic development in the information age over recent years. Employees should thus be educated in their duties to safeguard information in whatever media. It is suggested that this is reinforced in letters of employment and induction training of all new employees engaged by attorneys. It is also necessary that the terms governing the employment of existing employees and the education of existing employees is also reviewed and addressed accordingly.

To optimise the use of social media it must be used responsibly and adhere to the professional obligations mandated by relevant regulatory bodies and the ethics that legality encourages and expects from its employees, users of its information and its information systems. The question that we should ask is "What are the legal ramifications in the use of social media from a professional perspective?" Social media is neither wondrous nor worthless but its value lies in how it is used. Further, that it does not transform appropriate and professional conduct into something unethical or unprofessional.

Social media law is the law that regulates any conversation that takes place over the internet, called User Generated Content (UGC). If a person/ company publishes information (including comments on Tweets, Retweets or even the hosting of comments on one's Facebook page) you are subject to the same laws that would apply to the traditional media. This means that every person who has access to the internet and publishes content is to all intents and purposes, a publisher.

In the past, individuals - even political representatives - had not been very successful in winning lawsuits against comments posted about them on social media, however recent events have now shown many successful lawsuits being won for claims of Defamation of Character. The argument that the internet allows for freedom of expression (without boundaries) is no longer tolerated as the recent wins in lawsuits have proven. The law of defamation says that as soon as the publication reaches a third party it has been published. If you have a Facebook profile (even if it only has five friends) and you post a comment there, it has been published. This means that your content on your Facebook Profile - including your Tweets and Re-Tweets - is subject to defamation law.

Freedom of expression is a fundamental right but it is not unlimited as far as freedom of expression on the internet is concerned. If your speech infringes on the rights of another, violates copyright or constitutes hate speech, then your freedom is legally limited. Citizen Journalists (individuals who tweet opinions and comments on the internet for others to see) need to be aware that they could be subject to lawsuits.

Whether an individual 'citizen journalist' or 'traditional' journalist publishes information that could be deemed defamatory to either an individual, company or brand, it seems that one could certainly be liable for defamation for unsubstantiated negative comments (Moolman, 2012).

One should make absolutely certain that whatever one says 'in public' (on

Facebook, Twitter, Hello Peter and other social media platforms on the internet) is in fact truthful and that you can back-up your comments with substantiating evidence and factual information should you be expected to defend your comments in a court of law.

Conclusion

Competitiveness in the field of tourism research can be defined as “the ability of a destination or business to create and integrate value-added products that enable local resources to sustain and maintain its market position over its competitors”. There is a new paradigm of competitiveness. It is believed that innovation is a key factor for business success and, ultimately, for the growth of national economies. Traditionally, there was the idea that the tourism sector, as service sector was a sector that developed little innovative activity and applied innovations produced by the manufacturing sector. However, in recent years there is increasing evidence that the service sector plays an important role in the use and generation of innovations, but innovation in this sector has specific characteristics.

The literature review confirms the importance of clusters in economic development, contributing positively to the innovation process, facilitating relationships with other companies and institutions to better meet consumer needs, channelling knowledge and information. Today it is universally acknowledged that information Technology has revolutionized communications and tourism, among others. The role of the user in Tourism 2.0 is clear, through interaction and direct contribution to the environment. There are already many social networks aimed at sharing experiences, photos, and rating the quality of services received in different areas of the tourism industry. Research into social media in tourism might find new interests in four main directions: community engagement and communication, comprehensive marketing strategies, differentiated destination

management and the legal and ethical issues arising from using social media in tourism.

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