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Social Media in Experiential Marketing

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Abstract

Through targeted tourism-related practices, the hospitality industry has been able to grow broadly over time. It has also been able to accommodate each new generation of tourists seeking unique experiences on a global level. To do so, the industry continues to successfully leverage technological advancements and improvements in business practices and experiential marketing efforts. All of which has helped the industry maintain both stability and sustainability. A significant advancement in particular involves the personalization of preferences instigated by consumers themselves, who by making such decisions become even more informed, and confident patrons, users, and customers. Much of the latter is especially dependent on reliable Internet infrastructures and other virtual set-ups, including customizable social media spaces intended to draw clientele to specific – yet diverse – global events. The following review, which examines the impact that social media has had on the hospitality industry, likewise weighs the strengths and challenges inherent to each medium against its social, economic, and technological context.

Keywords: Hospitality, tourism, sustainability, technology

Social Media in Experiential Marketing

Introduction

The hospitality industry has evolved significantly over the past four decades, as evidenced by changes in consumers' preferences for entertainment, which often coincide with the emergence and overall appeal or cachet of distinct global trends (e.g., thematic tourism) (Brown, 2014). The success of a new trend can often be attributed, at least in part, to correlated improvements to the management structures utilized by various stakeholders within the hospitality industry, including governments. The latter invest in the development of their tourism sectors to protect their heritage and so that their infrastructures might also benefit from any revenue accrued (Brown, 2014). The tourism sectors of Austria and the United States provide thousands of jobs via the hotel, transport, and entertainment industries and thus ensure sustained cultural connections. For instance, Austria hosts the world's biggest music festival known as the "Danube Island Festival," while the United States holds the Summer fest that earn significant revenue both economies. These cultural connections not only advance the industry but that also (positively) influence the diplomatic status of the countries involved.

The role that technology plays in the above is significant. Technology supports all essential processes including marketing, communication, reservations, billing and payments, and security (Watkins, Ziyadin, Imatayeva, Kurmangalieva & Blembayeva, 2018). The recent expansion of social media platforms has revolutionized the role of and approaches to marketing in the hospitality industry, which now embraces more strategic and organized methods to exploit consumers (Tinnish & Managal, 2012). The industry does so because it has become aware of the extent to which consumers rely on social media to access, explore, and review information on and gain insight into a wide variety of services, including food and lodging, at their own

convenience (Apel, Grewal, Hadi & Stephen., 2020). The decision-making processes of the average consumer benefit from the affordable and accessible nature of social media – thus, it has become a most reliable marketing tool. Through experiential social media marketing efforts in particular, businesses involved in the hospitality industry can create touch points through which all potential clients readily access them; these touch points are meant to leave prospective clients with a lasting impression that ultimately translates into commercial engagement (Sammiee, Chabowski & Hult, 2015). By offering services that encourage clients to develop trust in their brands, they likewise ensure that these same clients remain loyal (Sammiee et al., 2015). However, there is still much to investigate as to the lasting role that social media can play in the experiential marketing efforts of the contemporary hospitality industry.

Literature Review

Thus, the following literature review examines the impact that social media platforms have had on experiential marketing efforts and the advertising of services undertaken by the hospitality industry specifically. To do so, the strengths and challenges inherent to each platform investigated are weighed against that platform's social, economic, and technological context. As such, research and analysis from marketing professionals, information technology experts, sociologists, behavioral scientists, management professionals and economists highlight the different facets social media in its role in the global tourism and experiential marketing within the past ten years. The publications analyze the viability of social media and validate its usefulness especially in the United States and other major tourist destinations like Thailand in Asia by reviewing the effectiveness of its application in all major events and festivals like the annual Donauinselfest music festival in Austria that hosts up to three million participants (Sammiee et al., 2015). Therefore, the role of social media in the success of the tourism activities

will be clarified from different perspectives, and an insight into its strategic future will come from the review.

Goals of Experiential Marketing

Experiential marketing is a well-organized process that begins with planning. As with every other industry, the hospitality industry thrives best when there is proper planning. The latter is a multifaceted process that entails getting together a complex association of ideas. During the implementation phase, these ideas will likely come with a myriad of challenges; therefore, measures to mitigate any unexpected outcomes must be part of the contingency plan to avert failure (Apel et al., 2020). Within the hospitality industry, the remarkable skill required to both successfully plan and market tourism-related activities and events in particular is a mix of creativity, agility, and objectivity. The mix of social media tools provides potential clients with a variety of creatively developed content and gives them options that make all offers competitive and worthy of their consideration. With agility, tourism firms and their marketers will keep up with emerging trends and address any concerns that arise regarding their proposed offers. By doing so, they improve their customer experiences and build their trust in the brand's quality (Apel et al., 2020).

Social media provides an especially useful avenue for experiential marketing by guaranteeing the real-time promotion and endorsement of diverse experiences. How accessible, transferable, and adaptable such "real-time" promotions and endorsements are through social media strengthens their impact. Further, it is the process of content creation, whereby any experience is made memorable through its sharing, replicating, or customizing, that will attract new and/or potential clients, who often decide the value of an experience, and thus the kind of influence a particular platform has, based on the number of positive reviews it receives (Apel et

al., 2020). Amid economic challenges and restrictions due to global social and political dynamics, many clients in the tourism industry rely heavily on social media to accomplish their goals and to enjoy the benefits that come with the industry.

As the hospitality industry entails the selling of services more than goods, the success of its marketing dimension hinges on the sentiments of target clients toward the service (or offer) promoted. Because it exists in a global (as opposed to limited) space, the industry must specially rely on repeat customers who trust the brands they use; consequently, it can really only maintain value through loyalty and the steady stream of revenue that loyalty supplies (Sammiee et al., 2015). Adding in social media to its stable of marketing resources, then, must be done in such a way that standing relationships can be fully maintained while new ones are cultivated. With regard to the latter, brand success through the vehicle of social media depends on the ability of the platform chosen to offer the means to conduct research on client awareness and to promote relationships that are satisfying for all parties involved.

“Mainstream” Social Media Platforms

Mainstream social media platforms include Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter; for the purposes of this review, email blasts and blogs were also investigated. Each fits well into the required specification that it be a marketing platform that yields the maximum utility for its users – albeit differently, as is highlighted in the subsequent parts of this review. An additional benefit of social media is the diversity it offers in terms of presentation and user-friendliness (Apel et al., 2020). Moreover, each social media platform described below contributes to economic growth not only by providing sources of income for otherwise unemployed professionals but also, in terms of the hospitality industry, by influencing tourists to spend their money on the most advertised (and, likely, most expensive) hotels, restaurants, local entertainment spots, and

transport companies (Watkins et al., 2018). Economic growth and development via the engagement of social media extends into the political arena as well; most specifically, such “development” can be observed in improved diplomatic ties and cultural exchanges (Cherkasov et al., 2017). For example, when a government sponsors an official Twitter handle, which it then uses to convey its political, economic, and social agenda, it opens itself almost automatically to broadened cultural interactions.

Facebook. Facebook is perhaps the most widely used social media platform on the globe, with approximately 1.8 billion active subscribers; as such, it unquestionably offers greater exposure than other, more conventional marketing practices employed by the hospitality industry (Sammiee et al., 2015). For example, it allows for the creation of “pages,” which any business or other group or organization can leverage to attract a following and to post updates and offers; it also allows for real-time communication and unlimited interaction between multiple users. Unlike emails, “pages” offers businesses and organizations the opportunity to boost their image and to select and package their material, publicize free promotional gifts and other giveaways, and share news, photographs, and videos designed to attract a greater number of followers.

Instagram. Instagram is a photo-based social media platform that encourages users to share still photos and short videos of their experiences (including their work and home environments). It is one of the more lucrative marketing platforms for the hospitality industry, as every hotel, restaurant, and “destination” with an account can use the app to gain a competitive edge by posting picturesque landscapes, snapshots of serene getaways, and delicious food served in opulent settings. The creativity on display helps the corresponding business or venue better communicate with a diverse (and perhaps multilingual) audience – that is, with a minimal

number of words (Watkins et al., 2018). Once a user lands on a photo that strikes their interest, usually the next step they take is to click on the link provided for more information.

Twitter. Twitter offers a much faster and reliable promotional outlet where target themes and personalities are reached directly through mentions. It is a brilliant mix of limited characters to convey messages that can link to other platforms with ease (Watkins et al., 2018). Like Facebook and Instagram, it accommodates videos and photos, and allows for direct conversations through direct messaging. Twitter is famous for topical dominance depending on the subject, and it cuts across different themes in the global social environment with real time effects based on its use of hash tags to direct the conversations (Watkins et al., 2018). Therefore, it is a genius option for experiential marketing, albeit with unpredictable outcomes on the communication sent out. A follow only approach allows people to align to their preferred accounts of interests. As well, they interact with influencers and verified personalities who affect outcomes of discussions and perceptions, making it a better analytical tool for the industry with real time statistics.

Email blasts. Email blasts are not very popular with people who do not require a lot of material up front yet are useful in maintaining contact with existing clients. As such, emails are typically a more valuable form of communication between companies and their clients who require documentation of services rendered. Despite being somewhat old-fashioned and limited, emails are more private than other modes of communication (notwithstanding the threat of cybercriminals that is still present) and thus remain the most credible avenue for the exchange of information (Brown, 2014).

Blogs. Although they comprise the perspectives of their writers almost exclusively, blogs do offer insight into some of the most popular global destinations and events in existence. It is

important to note that the opinions of their writers may function to either attract or repel potential clients; a writer's dedicated following is most likely to agree with their perspectives, while their involvement (and potential kickbacks) might be enough to turn others away completely.

However, it is also important to note that many tourist destinations experience increased profits through the employment of social media "influencers" and other associated tactics and so justify their engagement. Ultimately, then, the use of blogs is most often a choice left to the vendors alone.

Internal Control Measures

The ideal internal control measure for the hospitality industry is the connecting of official websites and communication portals to affiliate social media pages (Titu & Titu, 2016). For follow-up inquiries and to ensure the retention of existing clients, for example, customer surveys distributed via Facebook or even Instagram are one means of ensuring that constructive feedback reaches its respective entity (Asmelash & Kumar, 2019).

Taking cognizance of the fact that social media activities require a significant amount of time for an individual to manage, entities in the industry also diversify to a more reliable way of handling direct feedback to the businesses. They use chat bots for communication with people who call to make inquiries as they aim to improve the overall customer experience. The systems do not require human assistance as they use automated voice conversation programs that focus on business related customer needs as they call in with enquiries. The option relies on accurate preprogrammed information to the satisfaction of clients, leaving the option of direct communication with agents when there is not help possible from the bot. The technology keeps track of reservations made, and assists in projections for all seasons, so that the businesses strategize on how to remain profitable during hard moments. For instance, data from the chat

records may inform the hospitality management professional to use their Social media platforms in making necessary adjustments to their offers and activities with reference to their profit motive and the prevailing social, economic and political contexts in their locations. Considering that some events are seasonal and speculative, they take cognizance of the possible environmental (social, economic, political, and ecological) impacts of hosting large numbers of clients and make appropriate mitigation plans to avert possible adverse outcomes (Franzoni & Pelizzari, 2016). Ultimately, with social media integrated into the normal operations of the hotel and tourism industry, different experiences that lead to satisfaction for different groups of people will result in better tourism events and proper hospitality management practices that are memorable, profitable and sustainable.

Technologically Aided Marketing

The use of social media impacts industry with a full flow of information and ideas. Therefore, it calls for a faster and more reliable feedback system to diverse clients' needs than those of the traditional hotel industry systems (Cherkasov, Seredina, Mishurov, Adashova & Lebedeva, 2017). As well, the experiential marketing approach must have a culturally sensitive conflict management system to cater to the diversity of clients who interact with the hotels and other service providers. With stiff competition, stakeholders uphold the policy provisions and industry regulations to ensure fairness to all stakeholders regardless of their size in the market. Therefore, integrity in the marketing platform ensures that competitors strive to adopt better strategies in reaching out to their target clients. Alternative assistance, like endorsements by influencers or major sponsors, also works best for businesses (Cherkasov et al., 2017). Therefore, the creative departments of the hotel industries and other tourism-related services capitalize on the potential use of social media applications to gain.

Reliable marketing strategies help companies in the hospitality industry to build strong brands that attract new customers and retain them by earning their loyalty. Therefore, much as they need their time to provide actual services as they live up to their promises, they also invest more time and resources to create brand awareness through consistently integrated campaigns that act as touchpoints for their clients (Asmelash & Kumar, 2019). Nonetheless, a marketing mix often includes print and digital mediums that target their clients. An advantage associated with the hospitality industry is that satisfaction dictates the approach; thus, the industry uses all possible means to their end (Kabanova & Vetrova, 2017). As such, the level of reach correlates directly with the volumes of sales and referrals, which affect the business positively.

The basis of the viability of the social platform is in the number of users who access the technology affordably. Accordingly, statistics show that there are more than two billion users of social media. As well, more than ninety percent of businesses make use of at least one social media platform to advance their interest through marketing campaigns. The hospitality industry also uses the avenue to enhance its market presence, especially after a steady decline in business performance in the past decade.

Diversity in Tourism

Other than cruises, wildlife safaris, and scenic site visits that define the popular tourism activities, many organizational practices have evolved to incorporate hospitality in their path to attaining their goals (Tinnish & Managal, 2012). Different sectors, including the academic, medical, and manufacturing ones, have resorted to conventions that bring together interested parties so that they accomplish their missions as they also enjoy some hospitality packages (Asmelash & Kumar, 2019). Therefore, the collaborative platforms ensure that participants stay abreast with the annual cycles around the world. In this way, social media sustains the

conversations, and every comparison of past and ongoing events takes place unhindered. Therefore, another advantage associated with the active uses of social media is that they attract the targeted audience to participate. Additionally, it incorporates a diverse composition of members who share a different perspective, thereby adding valuable insight to the discussions. According to the financial reports in the United States and Europe, social media contributes to the increased expenditure annually. As such, most tourist destinations around the world scramble to host the events which have since become an income generator for them. In Asia, for instance, holidaymakers merge their trips with conventions so that they get the most out of their duration of stay (Cherkasov et al., 2017). The music industry is among the biggest earners within the more significant entertainment industry, and companies like the Live Nation capitalize on festivals that they hold around the world. Therefore, in managing their businesses, other stakeholders in the hospitality industry cooperate with them for a share of their market by offering complementary services to visiting tourists.

Sports is among the most reliable provider of business for the hospitality industry during significant events like the FIFA World Cup, international Olympic Games, Formula One, and the World Rugby Series, among other athletics events where different nations present participants. Accordingly, successful events have a direct positive impact on the hospitality industry when they ensure client satisfaction (Brown, 2014). Nonetheless, the events ought to be profitable so that they receive support from the hospitality industry and so that all stakeholders can review the right practices and suggest different ways of improving the experiences through the social media successfully.

The main advantage associated with social media advertising and marketing is that the campaigns take unique links that lead directly to the required information (Brown, 2014). These

allow for easy research by analyzing the data and responses ranging from positive and negative reviews from respondents to inform the next course of action by the stakeholders. Traffic to the social media platforms also reports the level of attention that the business receives and helps to rate the importance of the services based on the ration of responses per given amount of time (Titu & Titu, 2016). Ideally, quick answers with negative reviews will imply that the idea will possibly damage the progress of the business, whereas an immediate reaction with positive responses will do the converse. On the other hand, any slow response will imply that the service package is typical, or that they are not interested at all. However, the social media platform creates an avenue for insecurity and puts many potential clients and businesses at risk. Cybercrimes extend through social media platforms, and other breaches of security occur and have lasting damaging outcomes to the companies and the clients.

Conclusion

Social media, just like conventional hospitality industry marketing, relies on detailed planning before execution so that the millions of messages that reach the potential market. Personalized Smartphone technology and access to the World Wide Web allows for continued access remotely and at everyone's convenience. Based on the number of users on the social platforms, it is easier for the industry to make projections of possible income based on events and bookings made beforehand as they plan for events and avail facilities and essential resources to meet the market demands. Accordingly, teamwork allows for coordinated efforts making events and experiences memorable and improves the levels of safety measures taken by the hotel industry so that every guest and participants receive their services in a safe atmosphere. With the emergence of periodical events, this allows for more creativity and regular income, which is excellent for the industry. As an evolving process, use of social media will revolutionize human activity in every

sector of the economies besides tourism. Economists and financial experts share their views on how the online space generates revenue through online marketing and other online jobs that gain popularity because of social media. Indeed, social media will maintain its place in strategic marketing, which includes experiential marketing going forward.

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