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INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON DESTINATION CHOICE: EVIDENCE FROM EASTERN PROVINCE IN SRI LANKA

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Abstract

In most recent years, Sri Lanka has encountered an increase in tourism, and social - media marketing has become a crucial tool for marketing the country. This study was conducted to saturate a research gap simply because there haven't been enough studies regarding the effect of social-media advocacy on the Sri Lankan's tourism industry. The research then looks at the influence of marketing on social- media, including social-media content & marketing behaviors on travelers' choice of locations after they arrive in Sri Lanka. The conceptual - framework was created based on the literature that was accessible after reviewing numerous studies that had been conducted in different nations. A Google survey questionnaire was used to conduct an on-line survey to collect data, and SPSS was used for data analysis. Simplified random sampling approaches were used to identify the respondents across the population. According to the findings, there is a positive correlation between information, perceived- ease of use, & electronic word of mouth, perceived risk and Destination Choice. However, the study indicates that perceived risk has less positive impact when compared to others.

Keywords: Sri Lanka tourism, Social Media, Social Media Marketing, Travel Destinatios Decision.

1.0 Introduction

The tourism sector in the current Sri Lankan setting has developed into one of the booming industries, where new developments have been made to entice new consumer bases. The vital role that customers play in internet in many hotels has elevated their involvement in digitalized marketing operations as a result of business-related activities. One of the most crucial business improvement areas in the hotel industry that seems essential in order to compete and even sustain in a highly competitive field is the use of electronic-commerce. A significant milestone in the development of the Internet is the blooming popularity of social - media platforms that allow Internet users to cooperate, communicate, and post uniquely content like blogs, videos, wikis, reviews, or images (Boyd & Ellison, - (2007)). Consumer-generated -content (CGC) is frequently produced through online users on social media platforms (Gretzel, 2006). Sri Lanka is currently noted as a rapidly expanding destination for travelers recently, and the number of visitors has been rising over time. As a result, this research addresses the study's background in relation to the Sri Lankan tourism business in eastern province and aspects associated to social media marketing.

2.0 Literature review

Social media marketing

Several researches on marketing difficulties, marketing tactics, and forms of marketing for various sectors are conducted in Sri Lanka in order to expand the market. Shivany, Velnampy & Kajendra (2014, 2013) Velnampy & Sivesan (2012, 2013) Kajananthan & Achchuthan. The word "social -media - marketing" has been defined and defended in a variety and different ways. Social media marketing is a new channel for businesses. Through online technologies like social- online communities and information sharing websites, social media marketing, also known as direct or indirect marketing is carried out (Gunelius, - 2011). It is a fresh way of relationship creating and WOM marketing that emphasizes both method of communication as opposed to one method communication (Icoz., Kutuk., & Icoz, -2018). Lower price, easy & freely reachable, global scope, effortless and flexibility, user collaboration, community reach, active consumer relations, effortless connectivity, and quantifiable are a few of the key benefits and unique- characteristics of social media (Weinberg,- 2009; Elley and Tilley, - 2009). According to research, social media and new technologies are now essential for the expansion of the travel and travel sector (Ban, Ancusa., Bogdan,, & ,,Tara, -2015). The swift extensive shipping and participation in social- media by tourists and travel operations have had favorable effects on the nature of services given by tourism service providers (Minazzi, - 2015). Additionally, it has claimed that social- media contributed to the building of brand recognition in the hospitality field, offering that field a competitive edge (Yan Xin, ramayah, SotoAcosta, Popa, and Ai Ping's, (2014)).

Electronic Word of Mouth (e-WOM)

According to Jalilvand & Samiei (2012), e-WOM refers to user-to-user communication on products and services that they are interested in. Modern technology has produced a virtual surrounding termed as e-WOM where there are none restrictions on communication or the movement of data across the globe (Cheung & Thadani, (2012); Xia & Bechwati, - 2008). In addition, the electronic revolution gave rise to a virtual realm called as electronic- word of mouth (electronic-wom). According to studies, electronic-WOM occurs on websites like Facebook, online forums and travel blogs particularly with the use of mobile - electronic gadgets like as smartphones (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). According to Samiei & Jalilvand (2012), the tourism enterprises are where e-WOM has a significant impact. Prior studies on the impact of e-WOM decision making on tourism were conducted by Sparks and Browning (2011) and Jacobsen and Munar (2012). According to earlier research (Fakharyan, Jalilvand, Elyasi & Mohammadi, 2012), eWOM is a key influence to attitude and behavioral inclination in utilizing social media.

Information

According to the study, customers select social media platform to determine how much information they require because comments on the information on these sites often contain explicit knowledge (Angeli, Grandi, & Grimaldi, 2013). Influences of social -media on traveler's destination choices are the subject of numerous research studies in the literature. Additionally, according to the study, social media connected websites are more effective and successful at promoting tourism unlike conventional marketing strategies (Milano et al., 2011). Furthermore, researchers discovered that word of mouth formed from sites that passengers frequently engage with is high reliable than word of mouth from unreliable sites (Mack, Blose, & Pan, 2008) and the confidence of travelers during decision making is positively impacted by

internet travel reviews and ratings (Gretzel, 2006). Contrasted to many conventional marketing strategies, where marketers and suppliers supply comparable facts, many passengers are inclined to obtain information through social media, claim Litvin, GoldSmith, and Pan - (2008).

Therefore, it is crucial to emphasize that tourist marketers can't ignore this growth and that it is essential to go along with new procedures according to market knowledge provided from social - media (Blackshaw & Nazzaro, - (2006).

Perceived -Ease of Use

The value that people have on using technology is reflected in perceived - ease of use (Davis, -1989). In addition, perceived usability in social - networking sites may spark the perception users got of these platforms that may help them easily achieve their target (Lin, 2007). As a result, those using may have a propensity to employ the technological innovation regularly if they believe it to be user-friendly and simple to use. According to research, usability is made up of features, structures, and user-friendly interactions between customers and service providers that meet customers' needs and expectations, particularly when it comes to information requests (Muoz-Leiva, Hernández-Méndez, & Sánchez-Fernández, 2012).

Perceived Risk (PR)

When an actual purchase transaction takes place, PR typically happens with online financial transaction threats (Kesharwani & Bisht, 2012). According to research, PR indicates consumers' knowledge of the potential vulnerability they may experience when disclosing their personal information to obtain information for purchasing decisions (Cox, 1967). Threats to online financial transactions are typically linked to PR (Kesharwani and Bisht, (2012); Ndubisi : Sinti, (2006)), particularly whenever the deal is combined with real choice. According to study, the ambiguity around internet transactions results from a lack of visible connection between customers, service providers and online shops (Al-Gahtani, 2011), which has a negative effect on people's behavior toward using technology (Dinev, Hu, and Yayla, 2009). In light of this, it is regarded important to draw attention to the security concerns associated with acceptance of new technologies (TanaKinjal, Deans, & Gray, (2010). its, said that, perceived risk also thought to be a factor that has a major detrimental impact on people's attitudes toward using technology (Dinev, Hu,: & Yayla, (2009); Schaupp, Carter, & McBride, (2010); Teo, Liu, (2007)).

Destination Choice

The decision of where to go is a "high-involvement" one that carries a high degree of risk (Jang and Cai, 2002). When choosing a site, prospective tourists often put a lot of thought into it to lower the perceived risk (Zaichkowsky,Hawkin et al. (2001; 1985). According to several authors, selecting a destination is largely influenced by the traveler's goal; in other words, a place is picked to meet the specific traveler's motivation (Mansfeld, 1992; Um and Crompton, 1990). Prospective tourists who are choosing a riskier place, say Bieger and Laesser (2004), frequently rely on advice from travel experts.

3.0 Methodology

The quantitative method was used in this study in accordance with the study questions and the researcher's objectives and the indented participants were people who accessed social media as a tool to choose their travel regions. The tourists who visited Arugambay and

Pasikudah as well as the managers and executive level staff members of the hotels in Arugambay and Pasikudah make up the study's total population. 379 samples were chosen using a straightforward random sampling procedure. Respondents are tourists, guests, hotel managers, and senior-level staff members in Arugambay and Pasikudah. These travelers and related people were given the survey, and the answers were gathered.

In order to draw a conclusion from this empherical-study, both primary & secondary data must be considered. The category of data that is most crucial is primary data. Primary data were gathered using the questionnaire approach. Each question relates to the research themes and provides more precise information. To build a strong questionnaire, historical literature was employed as a supporting resource. Travelers and hotel managers are mostly given questionnaires to complete in order to collect data.

Using the statistical tools SPSS 20 and Microsoft Excel, descriptive analysis and correlation analysis were conducted to reach the desired conclusions. Various analysis techniques are employed depending on the purpose, and the following Table shows the analysis techniques for each goal.

Figure 1: Conceptual frame work and hypothesis
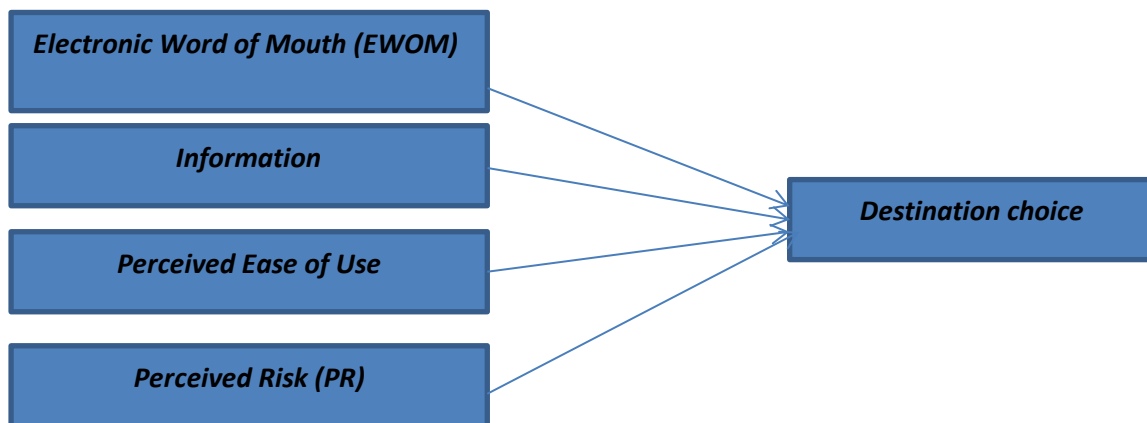
Hypothesis

The Destination Choice has been recognized as the dependent variable in this conceptual framework's four variable relationship routes, while the four attributes that influence the choice of destination has been designated as the independent variables. Researchers have come at the following hypotheses that are consistent with the predetermined relationship paths:

H1: There's a significant, positive relationship between the Electronic Word -of -Mouth (EWOM) in social media marketing and Destination Choice

H2: There's a significant positive relationship between information in social media marketing and Destination Choice

H3: There's a significant positive relationship between perceived ease of use in social media marketing and Destination Choice

H4: There's a significant positive relationship between perceived risk in social media marketing and Destination Choice

04. Analysis and Discussions

The examination of the census data reveals that the majority of age group responders in range of 18 to 25 are backpackers, while the majority of travelers in a certain age range of 26 to 45. Only a little percentage of respondents travel in luxury, and the majority of them are between the ages of 46 and 65.

According to demographic statistics, the majority of respondents who works full-time are vacationers, while the majority of respondents who works part-time are backpackers. Additionally, more women than men responded to the survey, according to the sample respondents. Additionally, the majority of respondents have only had 1-4 or 4-6 years of expertise in assisting social media as planning instrument for travel.

According to the study, only 5% of touristsor 18 respondents have arrived from Asian countries, which constitute the lowest number of visitors. Visitors from the United Kingdom make up 44% of the responders, while the remaining 51% are mostly from other European nations. The United Kingdom is represented by 44% of respondents, which is a sizable percentage.

The findings on each Destination Choice component demonstrated a high level of internal consistency. The table below contains the tested results for Cronbach's Alphas.

Table1: Reliability Measures

Scale	No .of .Items	Cronbach's alpha value
EWOM	4	0.781
Information	4	0.763
Perceived Ease of Use	4	0.729
Perceived Risk	4	0.711
Destination Choice	4	0.747

Source – survey data (2022)

The research's main aim was to determine how social media marketing affected travelers' decisions to visit eastern part of Sri Lanka. The study focused more on how perceived risk, information, electronic word of mouth, and perceived ease of use affect Sri Lankan tourists' Destination Choices.

Table 2: Pearson's Correlation Analysis

		Ewom	Information	Perceived-ease of use	Perceived-risk
Destination choice	Pearson Correlation	0.421	0.299	0.292	0.018
	Sig.(2-tailed)	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
	N	379	379	379	379

Source - survey data (2022)

In light of the findings, it was discovered that all independent variables has positive relationship with Destination Choice EWOM has a positive relationship with Destination Choice and Destination Choice is 42.1% affected because of EWOM. Further-more based on the study, information, perceived -ease of use and perceived -risk has a positive impact in Destination Choice and impact is 29.9%, 29.2% and 1.8%, respectively.

Table 3: Coefficient of Information and Destination Decision

Model		Unstandardized - Coefficients		standardized -Coefficients	T.	Sig.
		B -Std.	Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	1.617	0.289		5.695	.000
	Information	-.118	.060	-.118	-1.926	.056
2	Ewom	.244	.047	.294	5.044	.000
3	Perceived Ease Of Use	.158	.036	.196	4.182	.000
4	Perceived Risk	.008	.025	.015	.275	.788

Source- Survey data (2022)

P value for electronic word-of-mouth and perceived ease of use is less than 0.05, so it suggests as the influence also significant, because the P- value for perceived risk and information is greater when compared to 0.05 that suggests as the impact is minimal.

5.0 Conclusion and recommendations

As a result, In order to determine what is needed to be effective with social -media as a marketing tool; tourism and hospitality marketers need a reference point. The study contends that Interactions and content obtained through social- media marketing heavily influence Choices for tourism destination. The majority of poll participants stated that using social -media marketing material would make choosing a holiday destination easier as well as there would be a discovery using content marketing on social media. Therefore, the emphasis of social media marketing strategies should be on making content accessible. In addition, the research study reveals so-called social media marketing promotes Adaptability of communicating with prospects passengers. According to the survey, passengers typically browse other tourists' social networking sites evaluations to identify which places create pleasant feelings on others.

Additionally, the social media reviews of other tourists help travelers feel confident in their choice of place. Therefore, it is crucial to not only give users the option to submit feedback and Evaluation as well, however, to show those submissions to different users to see. Finally, by doing more thorough studies pertaining to the Sri Lankan environment, it may be possible to comprehend the consequences of visitor interactions on social networks and how they affect buying decisions. It is well recognized that social networking sites will proceed to have a

significant impact on all facets of the Sri Lankan eastern province's tourism business, and this research simply offers a few details about this significant phenomena.

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