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Social Media Usage for Tourism: A Case of Rajasthan Tourism

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Abstract

This paper highlights the role of social media in the tourism industry. The conventional models used to reach potential tourists are having geographical and content related constraints. Social media provides various platforms to different stakeholders to communicate and exchange information among them. Due to its dynamics and viral capability, tourism businesses need to formulate some guideline or framework before start using Social Media. This study includes two-way methodological approach; primary and secondary as well. The primary study involves the in-depth interviews with the key stakeholders, and secondary part is based on the existing literature and portal of Department of Tourism (DoT), Rajasthan. Findings facilitate various challenges of social media use such as legal and administrative compliance faced by usual providers of tourist-related information. It further provides a better overview of tourist's use of social media and their characteristics, in order to acclimatize online marketing strategies by Rajasthan tourism.

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1. Introduction

In today's world, the internet has changed the way people lead their life. The total number of internet users was less than 1% in early 90's, now it is increased to more than 3 billion in 2016 [1]. This will cover around 42.5% of the world's population. Inexpensive cell phones and broadband connections are the driving factors for the reach of the internet. Information available on the internet is limitless with relatively at lower cost and effort [2]. The online tourism is referred as comprising all such informational entities (e.g. links, web pages) that relate to travel [3-4]. A conceptual framework on online tourism domain developed by [5] facilitates the interaction of tourists with travel planning industries. In the same line, the role of the internet was emphasized as mediating technologies in representing tourism [6-7]. Popular websites make easier access to tourists individually through search engines [7]. These advantages become the driving factors for tourists in decision-

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making and planning. It also plays an essential role in their overall travel experience. Indeed, there are professional tourists proving more credible and trustworthy information on the internet [8-9]. This creates many opportunities for tourist as well as tourist authorities to share the collective experience of others.

According to [10], "89% of global travelers are influenced by online travel reviews when choosing their accommodation". Information search reduces different uncertainty related to travel plans while improving tourist better experiences [11]. It is evident in the literature that online reviews enhance tourists' enjoy and excitements during their planning process [12]. More recently, the literature shows a positive relationship between travel benefits and social media use for travel planning [13-14]. These benefits are referred as a determinant of using social media in an effective manner for travel planning. Social media is referred as the most innovative Internet-based applications allowing users to generate content in different formats (e.g. text, pictures, and videos) [15]. Because of huge internet users, the amount of shared and discussed information can be easily predicted indicating how users interact socially [16].

Tourism department can provide more information through social media in a more interactive way which leads to collaboration with consumer review sites [17]. Before traveling, social media could help in getting ideas to imagine the visiting places for a particular place [18-20]. Eventually, many tourists generate numerous amount of content during and after their visits [21]. It encourages the use of social media while planning travel. It was also found that tourists use social media more before their trips than during the trip [22]. Most of the tourists searched information during holidays [23]. At the same time, they also share their personal experiences related to the context through posting comments and sharing multimedia content [24]. At the same time, social media optimization is a nascent industry. Users have the option to communicate with the department and share their experience on various tourism-related services [25]. Recently, new technologies make a positive impact on different functional activities of tourism such as promotions and campaigning [26-28].

Rajasthan is a premium tourism destination that attracts tourists for its versatility. Tourism shares the largest portion of revenue for Rajasthan. However, the effective and efficient use of emerging communication technology (for instance social media) might create a better travel experience for tourists. In the year of 2013 (Figure 1), total tourist visits are 31.735 million (30.3 million domestic and 1.43 million foreign tourists) [29].

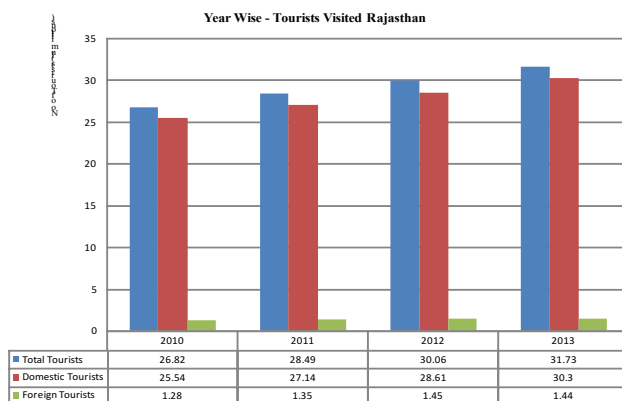


Fig. 1. Tourists Visited Rajasthan (Source: Ministry of Tourism INDIA, 2014)

Social media contains the vast amount of travel-related information in terms of travelers’ experiences which also serve as an important source of information for different stakeholders (i.e. potential tourists and tourism department for policy making). In this paper, we tried to find out the following research questions:

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