

A STUDY ON THE RELATIONSHIP OF SOCIAL MEDIA APPLICATIONS WITH GUEST INTENTION IN THE HOSPITALITY INDUSTRY

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Abstract

The Social Media Applications such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, Tumblr, Reddit, Snapchat, etc plays a significant role in the hospitality sector which includes the lodging, travel & transportation, food & beverages, event planning, etc. The rationale of the study is to understand and establish the relationships by the use of these social media applications with the hospitality business and the guest intentions for search and selection among the various services offered in the industry. The Guest Intention is defined by including the behaviour, perception and attitude of the guests in selecting and preferring among the various available brands of hotels, restaurants, spa, etc. in the hospitality sector for a particular location. These attributes helps the tourists in their decision making process for the finding of the right kind of hotels, transportation service, food services in a cost effective manner and also without any kind of hassles. For this study the data were collected from 283 respondents using a semi-structured in depth interview method, from various guests visiting the hotels, restaurants, etc. to the Eastern part of India. From the analysis of the data, it was observed that only a few of the Social Media Applications such as Facebook, YouTube and Twitter has significant relationships with the guest intentions in searching and selection for the right kind of services and brands in the hospitality industry. The outcome of this study mostly helps the unit owners and managers of this hospitality industry. For them it is suggested to integrate the use of social media applications with the marketing strategy for their organizations. Overall, it can prove beneficial for the entire hospitality industry having a long-term sustainable growth and development even in the difficult times also.

Keywords: Social Media, Guest Intention, Perception, Decision Making, Hospitality Industry.

1. Introduction

Now a day's Social Media usage becomes more prevalent in our day-to-day life as well as it becomes a commodity of our basic requirements, we depend heavily on these platforms for information requirements to discharge of our social obligations. Slowly and steadily it is making in-roads into our life sphere, so that literally we are compelled to be a part of it to restrain our Social identity and well being in the Digital Community. When this social media plays a powerful role in our life, then the usage of its applications in the various contexts becomes more relevant. Generally, the guests' preference is more inclined towards online participation rather than physical counter-based interaction for acquiring information related to hospitality based services. In that context the role of Social Media Applications are enhanced in a bigger context to fulfill the guest expectations. Some of the extensively used social media applications include Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, LinkedIn, Instagram, Pinterest, Tumblr, Snapchat, etc which are used by hospitality guests to take informed decisions related to various aspects of the hotel industry. It is also observed that the communication in the present digital scenario is very rapid and information is disseminated quicker than any other forms of communiqué.

The up-to-date social media applications have made it possible to receive any information in real time for the guests based on questions asked by them. The impact of social media and its applications are significant in the world of hospitality especially in hotels and travel. Thus, the hospitality industry utilized these social media applications to reach millions of potential guests and showcase their products and services. Social media influencers play a vital role in shaping the guest intention about a hotel, travel agency, and restaurant. The attitude, behavior and perception about certain products or services provided by the hospitality industry are mainly formed by these applications. Guests and tourists have created their own online community page where each of them talks about their experiences about a particular hotel, restaurant, travel agency, etc. These people also publish stories, upload photographs, good or bad, and make them popular among the community members.

Social Media applications act as a tool for social media marketing. The increasing use of the platforms such Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr, Instagram, etc had made social media marketing more important than ever before. Social Media Marketing is a methodology for drawing attention and exposure for a brand through the utilization of social media applications. Different promotional activities such as brand awareness, posting photos and videos, sharing links to other websites or applications, paid advertisement can be accomplished by these social media applications. These applications are very useful for all those related to the hospitality industry, because platform like Twitter, LinkedIn, Instagram are the best way to engage with existing and new guests for the industry. Almost all these applications have in-built analytical tool, monitoring system, and other technologies that provide valuable components for promoting the hospitality industry and attracting guests.

The subsequent question that arises is why social media is so important for any kind of business. "Meltwater" which is an media intelligence agency has come up with a survey conducted in the United Kingdom, has stated that almost seventy nine percent of the population log into Facebook, forty seven percent use Twitter, and forty one percent log into Instagram for getting information related to the hospitality sector. Social Media applications

are especially helpful to lodging sector which enables hotel to build upon guest relationship, enhance hotel's online reputation, and create awareness about the hotel. Social media plays a pivotal role in decision making and booking process for a guest. The guests start by going to the search engine, and then look for reviews posted by visitors on various social media platforms, which makes them indispensable marketing tool for the hospitality industry.

2. Literature Review

A lot of research has already been done related to the utilization of social media applications in hospitality industry. One such study showed the advantages such reduced costs, social interaction; direct market access, customer service, and interactivity play a important role in adopting these platform by the hospitality industry (Ristova & Dimitrov, 2019). Some of the commonly used social media applications in the hospitality sector are Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, Twitter, Flickr, Tumblr, YouTube, Google Hangout, Foursquare, Snapchat, etc. (Mukherjee & Nagabhushanam, 2016). Reduction in cost for both the organization and guests is factor for using these technologies. Creating a profile, use of these applications, sharing the information is absolutely free to use. The brands and organization can use internet to indulge in social interaction as thousands and thousands of guests log in to search for information, check emails, read newspapers, post their blogs, watching videos. It is also considered that a lot of guests look for tips and suggestions online for decision making process. These social media applications use advanced algorithms to track down the search and preferences of the guests and suggest them solution for the search of hotels, restaurants and other hospitality services. Customer Service is another aspect that can be taken care by the use of these technologies, as guests can use these social media platforms to service their requests. Interactivity between different stakeholders in the hospitality industry helps in shaping the content in the real time.

In another study conducted by Statista the importance of social media applications as a digital service is highlighted by another set of researchers. The advent of Internet is the single most defining phenomenon happening at the present time which has transformed the world as we know it. The "World Wide Web" is a communication model built on the Internet which helps in communicating in different ways such as micro blogs, social games, messenger applications, corporate networks, blogs, photo distribution platforms, social networking, and many more. As per a well known statistical website by the name of Statista (2018), it was stated that the power of social media is so powerful that the number of users across the world is expected to reach somewhere near to three billion active social media users every month in the year 2021, which is about a third of the entire population of the earth. Around 755 million of these users are expected in 2022 be only from China and about a third of a billion from India. The penetration rate for social media in North America is around seventy percent of the population has at least one social media account. As of 2018, around eighty two percent of the United States population has a social media profile.

Social Media can be analyzed in various ways depending on how the stakeholder look at it and visualize the approach taken. Under normal circumstances, social media is dependent on Information and Communication Technologies such as the internet to avail the services of posting information, uploading and downloading audio and video files from the web. The

hotels, restaurants, travel agencies who belong to the hospitality industry have not yet found the effectiveness of using these social media platforms to develop their marketing strategies. There is an entire gamut of advantages such as reduced investment cost, direct communication with the guests, brand awareness, and also the theory that most of the guests tends to believe the information posted by other travelers rather than the commercial floated by the organization (Hailey, 2010). Direct Communication is one of the most powerful tools that are adopted by social media application, which enables both way communication between the organization and the guests. This means of communication encourages honesty and clearness. It may be visualized as a vehicle for social interaction among the guests and also with the service provider which takes place in virtual surroundings. The hospitality industry takes an elongated time to put on momentum towards technology and has a reputation for being unwilling to embrace technological advancements. As a result, the supremacy of the social media applications has not been harnessed by the hospitality sector and has not been integrated into the marketing initiatives. As the hospitality guests become more separated from the conventional communication channels such as newspaper, radio, television, etc., the industry must turn to social media applications such as LinkedIn, WhatsApp, Facebook, Tumblr, Instagram, etc. to reach out its guests.

3. Objective of the Study

There is couple of objectives for this paper. The foremost objective is to understand the importance and effects of using social media applications such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn, etc in the hospitality industry. The second objective is to find out and establish a relationship between social media platforms and guest intention in the hospitality industry. Guest intention generally includes guest behavior, attitude and perception towards choosing the right brand from the hospitality sector using social media tools. Based on the objectives mentioned above the following hypothesis is developed so it can be tested for a conclusive result.

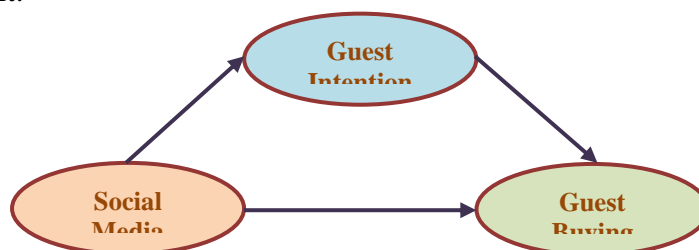


Figure 1: Research Model

The proposed research model can be seen in the above mentioned diagram. From the proposed research model following research questions can be formulated for further analysis.

1. What is the effect of using social media applications such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Tumblr, Pinterest, etc. on Guest Intention?
2. Will the utilization of these social media applications change the buying behavior of guests when they are choosing a particular hotel to stay, or a restaurant to dine in?

4. Research Methodology

In this study an in-depth qualitative approach was adopted to analyze the guest intentions to make a choice for a particular brand of hotel, or a restaurant, or travel plan and to what extent they are influenced by social media applications.

A semi structured questionnaire was developed to collect the data from the respondent who visited various hotels, restaurants, tourist places in the Eastern part of India. A total of 400 questionnaires were administered in on-line mode, out of which 283 responses were finalized after the careful selection and found to be suitable for any further data analysis. So for this study our sample size is 283. The sampling technique adopted was convenience sampling as the data was collected by sending the questionnaire to all the respondents through email as it was not possible to collect the data physically because of the COVID-19 Pandemic Scenario. The reasons behind choosing this method of sampling are many. First of all the data could be collected quickly from the respondents who were visiting these hotels, restaurants, etc. This method was very economical for the researcher as the sample collection was limited to a specific geographical location. The details of the respondents were meticulously collected through a number of channels such as hotels, restaurants, spas, travel agencies, etc. after usage of service experience in different in the eastern part of India. Another reason of choosing convenience sampling was the response rate of the guests. Most of them were unwilling to provide the answers to the questions that were asked. SPSS Version 20, application package was used to analyze the demographic profile of all the respondents. The tool was also utilized for computing the Cronbach's Alpha which indicates the reliability status of the data collected for each of the construct. There was couple of other techniques such as the correlation analysis and Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) were used to establish the association among Social Media Applications, Guest Intention and Guest Buying Behaviour. CFA helped in confirming that the items that were listed under each of the construct were valid or not. It was found that all the items were properly listed under the required construct.

Based on the research questions discussed in the previous section, following are couple of hypothesis that was developed for further analysis.

H₁: Use of Social Media Applications has no relationship with Guest Intention.

H₂: Use of Social Media Applications has no relationship with Guest buying behavior.

5. Data Analysis and Interpretation

Data Analysis was conducted using the SPSS application package in which a number of techniques were applied on the collected set of data. Table 1 indicates the demographic profile of the guests. It includes the different hotels to which the guests went, gender, marital status of the guests, age group and highest educational qualification of the guests. The most prominent responses came from hotels such as Ginger Group, Mayfair and Trident. It was also surprising to note that most of the guests can be categorized as "Young" from the age group of 21 to 40 years old. The educational qualifications of the guest were also impressive as ninety percent of the sample size were having qualification as post graduate or higher.

Table 1: Demographic Profile of the Guests

	Parameters	Frequency	Percentage
Hotel Name	Fortune Park Sishmo	30	10.6%
	Ginger	26	9.2%
	Kalinga Ashok	25	8.8%
	La Franklin	20	7.1%
	Mayfair	24	8.5%
	New Marion	17	6.0%
	Pal Heights	24	8.5%
	Sandys Tower	21	7.4%
	Swosti Grand	24	8.5%
	Swosti Premium	15	5.3%
	The Crown	17	6.0%
	The Presidency	15	5.3%
	Trident	25	8.8%
Guests Gender Profile	Male	194	68.6%
	Female	89	31.4%
Age of the Guests	21 – 30 Years	82	28.97%
	31 – 40 Years	155	54.78%
	41 – 50Years	44	15.55%
	51 and Above Years	2	0.7%
Marital Status of the Guests	Unmarried	56	19.8%
	Married without Children	92	32.5%
	Married with Children	133	47.0%
	Divorced / Widowed / Separated	2	0.7%
Educational Qualification of the Guests	Higher Secondary	10	3.5%
	Undergraduate	18	6.4%
	Post Graduate	54	19.1%
	Diploma	83	29.3%
	Others	118	41.7%
Total		283	100%

The next set of tables including Table 2 and Table 3 shows the reliability statistics and sampling adequacy of the data collected from the respondents. Table 2 shows the Cronbach's Alpha scores of all the three constructs in the model each of which has seven, six and eight items respectively. The scores of all the dimensions have been computed to be greater than 0.7. From the previous literature it has been confirmed that any score between 0.7 and 1.0 is excellent for further data analysis. Any Cronbach's Alpha score of less than 0.6 is unsuitable for further analysis as it means the responses collected do not have any uniformity.

Table 3 shows the results of KMO and Bartlett's test of sampling adequacy. This test is performed to find out whether the sample size taken by the researcher is adequate enough for the study. From the table it found that the scores for all the dimensions are between 0.8 and 1.0, which suggests that the number of sample taken is adequate enough for carrying out further data analysis. It would be pertinent to mention that the significance level (p-value) in

each of the case is found to be 0.000, which suggest that the results are significant. In case of KMO score less than 0.8, the sample size is not adequate to carry out further analysis.

Table 2: Reliability Statistics

Name of the Construct	Number of items	Cronbach's Alpha Score
Social Media Applications	7	0.819
Guest Intention	6	0.745
Guest Buying Behaviour	8	0.766

Table 3: KMO Measure of Sampling Adequacy

Name of the Construct	KMO Sampling Adequacy Score	Significance Level
Social Media Applications	0.873	0.000
Guest Intention	0.822	0.000
Guest Buying Behaviour	0.850	0.000

Once the reliability and sampling adequacy are established for all the construct of the research model, further analysis needs to be conducted for establishing the association among Social Media Applications, Guest Intention, and Guest Buying Behaviour. The hypotheses are already established previously and data analysis has to be carried out in order to establish the relationship among all the constructs from the model. Correlation Analysis is the most appropriate method for establishing the relationship between the independent and the dependent variable.

Table 4 shows the correlation between the items of Social Media Applications and the items of Guest Intention. It is found that there exists a moderate to high positive correlation between the use of social media applications and guest intention towards specific hospitality services. Some of the social media applications such as FaceBook, Instagram and YouTube have overall higher positive correlation with different dimensions of Guest Intention as compared to other applications such as Twitter, Tumblr, and WhatsApp. The results that were computed were significant as the p-value for all the applications were less that 0.05.

Table 5 explains the association between the Social Media Applications and Guest Buying Behaviour. It can be interpreted that there exists a low to moderate positive correlation between both the construct taken into consideration. Social Media Applications such as Facebook, Twitter, and WhatsApp had somehow moderate positive correlation with different dimensions of Guest Buying Behaviour. Other applications such as Instagram, Snapchat, Tumblr, etc. had a lower positive correlation. All the results were significant as the p-value for all the applications were found to be less than 0.05.

On the basis of analysis and the results presented in the tables in the previous section, it can be confirmed through the interpretation that both the hypothesis that were formulated earlier for the study are rejected. The basis of rejection is clearly mentioned in the previous section which establishes a positive correlation between the Social Media Applications and Guest Intention as well as Guest Buying Behaviour. The significance level is well below 0.05, which proves that there exists, a significant association between the Social Media

Applications and the Guest Buying Behaviour for the Hospitality Industry and the study is able achieve its objectives.

Table 4: Relationship between Social Media Applications and Guest Intention

		Correlations										
		Facebook	Instagram	Twitter	YouTube	Tumblr	WhatsApp	Snapchat	Speed of Service Delivery	Service Differentiation	Consistency of Service	Service Customization
Facebook	Pearson Correlation	1	.497**	.508**	.462**	.424**	.392**	.377**	.383**	.411**	.409**	.394**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000
Instagram	Pearson Correlation	.497**	1	.446**	.467**	.399**	.345**	.300**	.305**	.313**	.347**	.248**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.001	.000	.000	.000
Twitter	Pearson Correlation	.508**	.446**	1	.498**	.327**	.331**	.354**	.366**	.281**	.283**	.390**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000		.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000
YouTube	Pearson Correlation	.462**	.467**	.498**	1	.361**	.314**	.468**	.314**	.386**	.384**	.354**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000		.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000
Tumblr	Pearson Correlation	.424**	.399**	.327**	.361**	1	.289**	.340**	.424**	.291**	.279**	.273**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000		.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000
WhatsApp	Pearson Correlation	.392**	.345**	.331**	.314**	.289**	1	.304**	.307**	.243**	.260**	.230**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000		.000	.000	.000	.000	.000

Table 5: Relationship between Social Media Applications and Guest Buying Behaviour

		Correlations											
		Facebook	Instagram	Twitter	YouTube	Tumblr	WhatsApp	Snapchat	Improved Service Experience of the Guests	Enhanced Information Access	Enhanced Goodwill and Reputation	Develops Brand Awareness and Brand Image	High Level of Social Acceptance
Facebook	Pearson Correlation	1	.497**	.508**	.462**	.424**	.392**	.377**	.323**	.292**	.253**	.231**	.294**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000
Instagram	Pearson Correlation	.497**	1	.446**	.467**	.399**	.345**	.300**	.193**	.258**	.249**	.109	.313**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.001	.000	.000	.068	.000
Twitter	Pearson Correlation	.508**	.446**	1	.498**	.327**	.331**	.354**	.226**	.243**	.256**	.218**	.254**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000		.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000
YouTube	Pearson Correlation	.462**	.467**	.498**	1	.361**	.314**	.468**	.224**	.193**	.166**	.256**	.328**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000		.000	.000	.000	.000	.001	.005	.000	.000
Tumblr	Pearson Correlation	.424**	.399**	.327**	.361**	1	.289**	.340**	.276**	.219**	.308**	.223**	.254**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000		.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000
WhatsApp	Pearson Correlation	.392**	.345**	.331**	.314**	.289**	1	.304**	.280**	.285**	.202**	.208**	.189**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000		.000	.000	.000	.001	.000	.001
Snapchat	Pearson Correlation	.377**	.300**	.354**	.468**	.340**	.304**	1	.260**	.253**	.299**	.301**	.316**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000		.000	.000	.000	.000	.000

6. Conclusion

Considering the various aspects of the study, extract from the literature review, the recent gap analysis, the trends from the hospitality industry and the analysis of the collected data, many aspects were derived stating its influences on the industry scenario. The social media phenomenon is an ongoing trend and the hospitality sector and especially the hotel industry has lot to gain from it as it can add a number of dimensions such as brand awareness, customer satisfaction, and information access to the hospitality industry.

The different organization belonging to the hospitality sector needs to ensure that the social media applications become an essential element of the marketing department. The use of these platforms has another huge benefit for the industry in terms of cost and customer reach. In the present study, after conducting in-depth data analysis, and by adopting various methods such as Factor Analysis and Correlation it was concluded that still Facebook and Instagram are making a huge difference in the text based platform, and YouTube is dominating the video platform. As maximum number of guest are on Facebook, and Twitter the organization in the hospitality sector should be focussing more the text based platform as they influence the buying behaviour in a huge way. Some other applications such as Tumblr, Snapchat, etc. have less influence on the guest buying behaviour and the organizations should not spend much on these applications.

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