iJRASET
International Journal For Research in Applied Science and Engineering Technology



INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL FOR RESEARCH

IN APPLIED SCIENCE & ENGINEERING TECHNOLOGY

Volume: 5 **Issue:** XI **Month of publication:** November 2017

DOI: http://doi.org/10.22214/ijraset.2017.11099

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International Journal for Research in Applied Science & Engineering Technology (IJRASET)
ISSN: 2321-9653; IC Value: 45.98; SJ Impact Factor:6.887
Volume 5 Issue X1, November 2017- Available at www.ijraset.com

Role of Social Media in Tourism: A Literature Review.

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Abstract: ***Social media and its growing role in tourism has been increasingly an emerging research topic. From information search to decision making behaviours, social media plays a significant role in many aspects of tourism. Social media also plays a significant role in tourism promotion and helps the tourism service providers in focusing on best practices through the feedback they get from tourists and public via social media. The paper analyzes the research published in major tourism journals over the past 10 years. Review of literature suggests that social media has evolved as important platform in the past 10 years and has found a prominent role in tourism. It is critical to encourage thorough investigation into the influence and impact of social media. Most of the researchers have focussed on the positive side of Social media, and a very few have focussed on the negative side of social media. It's not that the negative side of the social media is less of a threat, but as we still see research in social media in its infancy stage so more focus is being shown towards the positive side of social media. It's important that the future researchers also focus on the negative side of social media such as online theft and fraud, fake surveys, etc. in order to strengthen and further extend the positive role that social media can have in Tourism.***

Keywords: Social Media, Literature Review, Tourism

I. INTRODUCTION

Social media refers to the means of interactions among people in which they share, create, or exchange information and ideas in virtual communities and networks. In today's times social media plays a very important role in almost every segment. Platforms such as facebook, twitter, Instagram, whatsapp, etc. have become important both from personal and business perspective. Social media has made an enormous impact on the tourism industry. Consumers engage with social networking sites in order to make informed decisions about their travels and share their personal experiences which they had at a particular hotel, restaurant or airline. As a customer service channel social media is simply impossible to ignore. People are using social media before, during and after they travel to share experiences, bad or good. Social media has facilitated and expanded people's ability to share travel experiences with a larger and wider audience than ever before.

Social media and its growing role in tourism has been increasingly an emerging research topic. From information search to decision making behaviours, social media plays a significant role in many aspects of tourism. Social media also plays a significant role in tourism promotion and helps the tourism service providers in focusing on best practices through the feedback they get from tourists and public through social media. Social media is considered to be an important strategy in order to market tourism products (Zeng & Gerritsen, 2014).

In the tourism industry social media has altered the landscape of marketing. Today most of the travellers determine their travel plans based on social media shares and reviews, thus making online customer service a crucial part of building a positive brand reputation. Emergence of social media has disrupted the traditional customer service models – for hotels and travel agencies alike.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The widespread use of Web applications and the increasing number of social media applications during the last decade have given a new shape to the tourism destination promotion. It has become must for Destination Management Organizations (DMO) to adapt and meet the challenges placed by new interaction and communication paradigms in the tourism sector. (Roque & Raposo, 2016)

Social Media is assuming an inexorably vital part as information sources for travellers. Xiang and Gretzel, 2014 affirms the developing significance of social media in the online tourism area.

In the context of destination marketing, social media is a growing area of study, and the demand for research will continue, judging by the exponential growth in social networks over recent years. There is a large number of travellers who are influenced by user generated content and the numbers keep on increasing, thus presenting a number of challenges and opportunities to DMOs. (Lange-Faria & Elliot)

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Social media are increasingly relevant as part of tourism practices affecting destinations and businesses. Findings suggest that for experience sharing, social media are predominantly used after holidays. It is also shown that there is a strong correlation between perceived level of influence from social media and changes made in holiday plans prior to final decisions. Moreover, it is revealed that user-generated content is perceived to be more trustworthy when compared to official tourism websites, travel agents and mass media advertising (Fortis, Buhalis & Rossides, 2012).

Online marketing has grown in importance in the tourism industry over the years. Social media allows companies to interact directly with customers via various online platforms. It also allows companies to monitor and interact with customers. But when we talk of Airlines, It is shown that there is a lack of strategic perspective of social media as it is being used with limited uniformity. (Hvass & Munar, 2012).

The Information Communications Technologies (ICT) plays a major role in tourism, travel and hospitality industry. Integration of ICT in tourism has become essential for the success of a tourism. With the integration of ICT facilitates, an individual can access the tourism product's information from anywhere at any time. Moreover, in just a single click on the keyboard, Tourism enterprises can also reach their targeted customers across the globe after emergence of mobile computers, web technologies etc (Bethapudi, 2013).

The most popular sites on the internet are the online social networking sites. Now people can share information, as the second generation of web based services is characterized to have consumer generated content (Miguéns, Baggio, & Costa, 2008).

Kim, Fesenmaier, & Johnson (2013) did a study to investigate as how social media shapes tourist's perceptions and emotions during the trip. Their study confirmed that social media such as Facebook has the potential to significantly affect tourists' emotions and thus, improve the tourism experience. (Kim, Fesenmaier & Johnson, 2013). Similarly, Zeng & Gerritsen (2014) also did a study to review and analyse the research publications of other authors focusing on social media in tourism. Through a comprehensive literature review, they found out that the research on social media in tourism is still in its infancy. It is critical to encourage comprehensive investigation into the influence and impact of social media (as part of tourism management/marketing strategy) on all aspects of the tourism industry including local communities, and to demonstrate the economic contribution of social media to the industry (Zeng & Gerritsen, 2014).

Sahin & Sengün (2015) did a study and investigated the importance of social media in tourism marketing. The study they did was based on a survey implemented on the students of Atilim University evaluating the effects of social media among young generation. Results of the survey showed that social media has a significant influence in tourism sector both in positive and negative ways. The results also showed that the the tourism decisions of young generation gets strongly affected by personal experiences and comments of other users on social media (Sahin & Sengün, 2015).

Buted, Gillespie, Conti, Delgado, Marasigan, Rubico, & Felicen (2014) did a study aimed to assess the effects of social media in tourism industry of Batangas province. The study showed that one should not expect that the outcome of social media is always positive as sometimes it can lead to false assumption, critiques and opinion. so there's still a need to consider different sorts of aspects. Tourism industries may use social media as their promotional tool but at the same time they should be ready for an immediate action to the problems that may arise due to the negative side of social media.

III. CONCLUSION

Review of Literature has shown that the social media plays a significant role in Tourism. From information search to decision making behaviours, social media plays a significant role in many aspects of tourism. Social media also plays a significant role in tourism promotion and helps the tourism service providers in focusing on best practices through the feedback they get from tourists and public via social media. Most of the researchers have focussed on the positive side of Social media, and a very few have focussed on the negative side of social media. It's not that the negative side of the social media is less of a threat, but as we still see research in social media in its infancy stage so more focus is being shown towards the positive side of social media. It's important that the future researchers also focus on the negative side of social media such as online theft and fraud, fake surveys, etc. in order to strengthen and further extend the positive role that social media can have in Tourism.

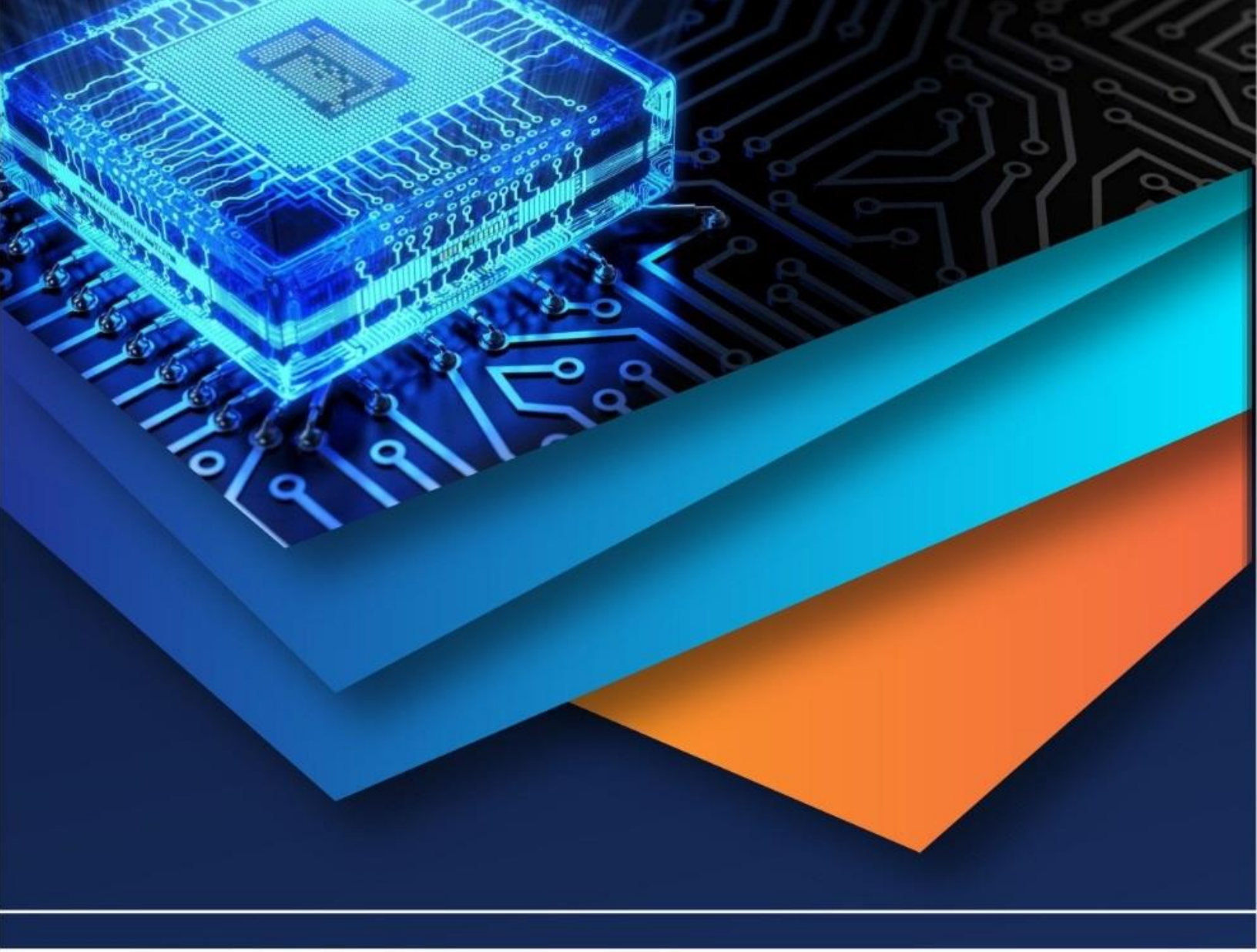
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