

Social Media: A Germane Search for Tourist Destination of Kushinagar

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Abstract—*Nowadays Tourism has been one of the favorite recreations of people of India. It has come as the most important aspect of man's contiguous behavior towards exploring new destinations and places to visit and his need to explore has given new dimensions and advancement to tourism industry. This has not only increased the tourist in India but also increased the prospective customers as a tourist whether domestic and international this has led in the growth of tourism industry which is not only acknowledged by government but also by the private sectors. As the world is becoming global, so does the tourist destination websites are and this is made easy with the help of Social Media. It refers to a aid for discovering new channels open for public disseminating their ideas and sharing their thoughts on a common platform. This paper help to analyze how social media helps the customer to find their destinations through different portals and select their destinations and also plan for the same through the offers provided by the different social media platform through the interaction based on the Organization Generated Content (UGC) and Destination Management Organizations Generated content (OGC). It focuses on the different social media platforms such as Facebook (Social Networking) and Instagram (Micro Blogging). The methodology used in the study is survey and content analysis of the social media websites.*

1. Introduction

With the advent of internet, tourism has been transmuted into the way the tourist search for the information and dispersed it in a way the people want and want to consume their travel needs (Buhalis & Law, 2008). In the recent years two mega trends has made their copious on internet accentuated the trends prevailing in tourism system with the Consumer generated content (CGC), such as blogs, virtual communities, wikis, social networks, collaborative tagging and media files shared on sites like YouTube and Flickr has become one of favorite online tool for searching tourist (Gretzel, 2006; Pan, MacLaurin, & Crotts, 2007). Many of these social media websites help the people to connect with the different communities and can share their experiences through blogs, comments and sharing their pictures, opinions and travel experience which can further prove as a information for others. This context has been supported by Thomas Friedman (2006)

In his "world is flat" where he determined that the sharing of information and content among the consumers as the internet use is becoming flat or easily available among the consumers of any place. On the same time social media is also becoming one of the powerful mediators between intervening of information and tourist can portray their trip and experience (Pudliner, 2007; Tussyadiah & Fesenmaier, 2009).

Internet has made it possible to explore from the large amount of information which is available and enable the travelers to search according to their needs and wants. In a way search engines are acting as a powerful gateway or channel through which the tourism company can provide related information to customers and same time tourist can find their desired information (Google, 2006; Xiang, Wo"ber, & Fesenmaier, 2008). Thus, the influence of social media has become as catalyst for tourist in searching for their travel need and travel destination search and related search with their travel.

With the help of this prodigy, we can say that Instagram and Facebook has become of the medium for creative promotion of travel destinations all over the world. This research is meant to find out the potential of Instagram and Facebook for promoting Kushinagar as the tourist destination and how it has helped the tourist worldwide through photographic contents and enable the destination for branding and promotion. The following section will elaborate the theoretical background and methodology which is based on photo elicitation and travel photography.

2. Theoretical background

With the presence of ICT's as Social media and web 2.0 provide ample amount of information search for their travel need such as flights booking, ticket availability, hotels and places to visit and restaurants (Litvin & Hoffman, 2012). With the advent of web 2.0 and with that social media the marketing and promotion of destinations has been speed up in comparison to the traditional media where the matter or content of delivery is the utmost important and time taken for the traveler to view that message (Munar, 2012). The same argument for kept forward by Trusov et al. (2009) on the same

ground about how social media has brought the changes in marketing and promotion of destination for building up tourism.

2.1 Social Media User Generated Content and Photographic Content

For searching any information in an easiest way social media has played an important role and primary sources for all tourism related searches (Manap & Adzharudin, 2013). This has made possible the use of phrase picture speaks a thousand words, where the user can upload his clicked pictures with content in it and enable many other users to search for that particular tourist destination and this further can create an expectation of visiting that particular destination or decreasing the chances of tourist visits (de Bruyn & Lilien, 2008). This method is called User Generated Content (UGC) where the user or the customer bound another traveler/ tourist to see the destination through his pictures and views and here the content generator is user himself. There are many other websites which enable to user to use User Generated Content (UGC) like, Instagram, Twitter, Facebook. These Applications provide Status Updates, Check-Ins, Re-tweet, Likes, wow and recommend user to update their contents. In reference to the tourism sector, social media has not only changed the way the consumer respond but also the outlook of tourist destination marketers (Manap and Adzharudin, 2013) and also it act as pull and push factor in tourist destination promoting and marketing (Hanan and Putit, 2014).

Instagram and Facebook not only serve as a media for sharing online photography which help in advertising, promoting, marketing and sharing of idea and opinions precisely and accurately (Hoffman & Novak, 1996; Doolin et.al, 2002; Sweeney, 2000). Stepchenkova and Zhan (2013) stated that the photography is the medium or way to express the feeling or capture the memory and in a way sending a reality message to himself/herself. Other than making a memory with the photograph it also help the tourist to share their travel experience with others (Groves and Timothy, 2001). With the new technology of camera and mobile phones in one that has also increased sharing of pictures through Social media, which has become the major leisure for the people. This has become the era of silent word of mouth feature with the help of pictures and saying everything about the destination or one can say in other word Instagram and Facebook has given user the opportunity to upload photo and a reality and experience to the users and people related with the user in destination search. Instagram and Facebook user has shaped the destination image and promotion and in marketing jargon this has termed as electronic word of mouth (eWOM) and engage the other user of Instagram and Facebook in commenting and enquiring about product and services (Bronner & de Hoog, 2011).

Social Media refers to “Participatory, “Conventional”, “Conversational” and fluid form of online communities (Qualman, 2009; Tuten, 2008) focused on user-generated

content (Buhalis & Law, 2008; Buss & Strauss, 2009; Ruzic & Bilos, 2010; Schegg et al., 2008; Xiang & Gretzel, 2010). Consumers as a tourist cannot avail the benefit of the destinations without consuming it as they are intangible in nature, in these personal references works well and they are influential on people also (Buhalis, 1998; Gretzel et al., 2000; Litvin, Goldsmith, & Pan, 2008).

3. Method

Most of the studies are based on tourist decision taken by tourist regarding the destination (Wang & Fesenmaier, 2002). But in this paper we tried to find out not only the reason or criteria for tourist destination search but search but also try to find out that how Social Media do tourist destination branding and promotion. If viewed through marketer/marketing perspective, the major role is played by the people who are directly connected with the travel industry like hotels, restaurants, bookings (travel agencies) and tour operators etc. Social media provides the tourist marketers the channel through which they can easily market their product to the tourist and can obtain more reach than the traditional way of branding and marketing and tourists are also interested in seeking from different website and information search is more easy through Facebook, Instagram and YouTube pages In order to get the insights through social media sites by the use of photographs, In depth interviews, photo elicitation technique, content analysis between two websites and different social media platform has been taken as a part of the research Not only the comment and dialogues of the users are analyzed but also the way they take their destination and plan their trip is also analyzed.

The first step to be taken as the part of the study was the uploading of photos in Instagram and Facebook of Kushinagar. The different account was searched in which in Instagram the account was @Kushinagarindia and @kushinagar.kasia and Facebook account handles are @kushinagar, @kushinagartourism. Being the known place of pilgrimage where Buddha took his Mahanirvana, is a new way tourism in Buddhism pilgrimage tourism. Second Step, we observed the traffic in the account and user posting like *pictures, hashtag, like and comments*. With this research we have examined, observed and discussed the photo contents of the Instagram and Facebook by examining it for 2 months, later some of the selected pictures are kept for photo elicitation interview. Last step of the research was selection of random 10 students of mass communication who has better knowledge of Social Media and digital marketing for photo elicitation interview. This process of taking 10 students for visual analysis of digital media and internet based tourism services. Therefore, the analysis of photo elicitation is a reflexive process for the subject (Collier & Collier, 1986, Pink 2004, Jenkins, Woodward & Winter, 2008).

4. Findings and Discussion

As a medium to capture we have used @Kushinagarindia and @kushinagar.kasia promoting through Instagram and

@Kushinagar and @kushinagartourism, where in Instagram handle @Kushinagarindia have 1253 followers, @kushinagar.kasia has 65 followers. In facebook page @Kushinagar has 113273 and @kushinagartourism has 1.3 M followers. These accounts are also linked with UP Tourism official websites and Kushinagar official websites for proper information search for Pilgrimage destination search. In every account the first picture posted is Parivana Stupa and Mahanirvana Stupa. The Picture tells the details about the Golden Temple in which the cremated of Lord Buddha took place and are the major attraction for every pilgrim tourist traveler and explorer tourist traveler. These temples also have a 6 meter long reclining statue of reclining Lord Budhha. Next Picture which attracted the eyes of the people is Wat Thai Temple surrounded by lush greenery. Not only have the pictures spoken about Thai temple but also the attraction of the Tourist towards Chinese temple. Other than Thai, Chinese Temples, one can find in the pictures about the beautiful Japanese Temple, where eight metal statue of Lord Buddha is placed and it is said that these statues are brought from Japan. This explains that these social media sites help the tourist to get the information about the destination with the pictures and comment on that places and video and website details about other things in Kushinagar. These Social Media websites sought to bring more and more tourist information. These accounts are also meant to generate public interest, so that more and more tourist can find the destination and visit these remote destinations like Kushinagar. In other instances, it increase the traffic on the page and websites and simultaneously open a route for consumer interaction and sharing platform.

Based on two months research analysis on the social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, and websites etc, it is found that social media has been successful in promoting and branding the remote and rural area tourism also brand the places. Social Media platform such as Instagram, Facebook help in tagging through hashtag, geo tagging, likes, wow, photographs and comments. Hashtag is one the favorite tool of tourist and people for sharing their pictures to all people around them and also help the user to search the information related to them. It also help the tourist in different classified ways such as (a) Grouping the contents for tourist uses. (b) Searching for travel contents. (c) It helps in expanding the arena of travel searches (d) Help in tourist promotion and branding. Other than this the another feature of Likes and Wow gives immediate and sort term response about the picture and content posted in the social Media platforms. This also help in creating instant choices of the destination as more likes more people like the destination which lead to more comment on the destination which further create the promotion of the brand and increase tourist visit in Kushinagar.

4.1 Social Media as a Self- Promotional technique

With the advent of Social media it is easy to communicate between the users and the organization effectively. It is one

the best place to communicate with friends and personal network of people (Subrahmanyam et al., 2008). Social networking sites such as Instagram, Facebook, Twitter not only serve as a platform for interaction but also for purchasing and sharing ideas with each other (Barczyk & Duncan, 2011).

Social media has come into existence from the year 2003 with the launch of MySpace for sharing views and later it was taken by Facebook in 2008 and later in 2010 Instagram came into existence for sharing photographs. For making it easy for the consumers, these app was made available as app from Anroid and Apple phones, whereas among all the social networking sites Instagram has come up as a boom or blessing in disguise for photo sharing platform (Chante et al., 2014; Salomon, 2013). In tourism sector these social media websites help in instant promotion of the destination.

Under the principle of user generated content (UGC), in which two way communication of the users are the preference in which Social Media acted a medium for providing the two-way interaction directly without any hazardous task. Having the combination of all the quality of wise sharing, photo sharing, commenting and two way communication has led the Social Media platform.

Hence, the purpose of this study is to explore the belief factors about the use of Instagram at the personal level using qualitative approach.

4.2 Social Media and Image Building

In the Tourism context, Internet or Social Media serves as an important source of information for tourist and travelers. It was suggested by Fernando (2007) that User Generated Content (UGC) is different from traditional form of media as here the users have the opportunity to have two way communications which was not served by the traditional form of media marketing and other than that the content generation is done by the user. Tools such as blogs and other social networking sites enable the users not only to add their own comments but also able to search information from other sources by the use of Tag with the help of keywords (Buhler, 2006).

According to Beerli and Martin's model of formation of destination image, there are two determinant factors that influence the form of destination image (Beerli and Martin, 2004: 660). First factor is personal factors including motivation, vacation experience and the characteristic of socio-demography. Second factor is information source, it including the type of individual in disseminating information and intensity of visits to tourist destinations. We saw that, tourism experience is the most valuable aspect to encourage user to promote tourism destination.

5. Conclusion

Instagram and Facebook plays an important role in Social Media networking sites, as in today's scenario two way

interaction is taking place of traditional form of one way communication. It help in brand promotion, Image building which indirectly leads to increase economy. The purpose of the paper is to explore the depth of Social Media as a new communication channel for destination promotion in Kushinagar. With the facility of geo-tagging an individuals can find out easily tourist destination location without wasting time asking many people. Users based social media or User Generated Content (UGC) provides a convenience access to user to access information and also disseminates it to public. User generated content (UGC) offer uniqueness that each user can be a marketer, such as a tourist destination. Finally, We concluded that UGC through social media help promote awareness and creates interest towards a product and destination (de Bruyn & Lilien, 2008).

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