



SOCIAL MEDIA A TOOL FOR TOURISM MARKETING: A STUDY AMONG TOURISM STUDENTS OF FEDERAL POLYTECHNIC, ILARO.

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Abstract

This paper established the usefulness of social media on the tourism establishments and its level of products patronage. Research has been conducted gathering information from students of the leisure and tourism department to define the perceptions of social media and tourism. A population of fifty students was randomly sampled for survey out of about ninety-five students of Leisure and Tourism Department. Simple percentage analysis was employed to evaluate the collected observations, and the findings indicate that Social media is a tool for tourism marketing, regardless of the quality of service at a particular tourism destination, the slightest positive comment or recommendation can have a significant effect on the business. Social media makes it possible for the establishment to have a briefer and direct communication with target groups through the website, e-mail short message, forum, etc. without committed much spending on the advertisement of tourism services. This study recommends that tourism enterprises should effectively use social media by creating official accounts for their business and hire staff to manage those accounts.

Keywords: Social-media, Marketing, Tourism, Student

Introduction

In Nigeria, Tourism has significantly contributed to the nation's development in various ways such as generation of employment opportunities, enhanced brand image, income generation and solving the problem of balance of payment deficit, boosting Gross Domestic Products and increasing the nation's per capita income (Egbaji, 2007). According to the Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Report (2015), the World Economic Forum Opinion Survey rates the effectiveness of Nigeria's marketing to attract tourists at 3.3 out of a 7-point scale (1 being the worst score and 7 being the best score). It is also important to note that Nigeria is ranked 141st position in the Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Index. Hence, it is obvious that in as much as tourism has assumed an increasing growth potential and is important in the socio-cultural and economic development of Nigeria, there is need for improvement of the effectiveness of tourism marketing in the nation.

Nigeria is a country of 148,093,000 inhabitants (UNDATA, 2009). The Hausa, Ibo and Yoruba tribes are the major ethnic groups and constitute over 50 per cent of the population. The other ethnic groups are Tiv, Ibibio, Ijaw, Kanuri, Nupe, Gwari, Igala, Jukun, Idoma, Fulani, Edo, Urhobo and Ijaw. Aside the population disparity and its associated tourism potentials, Nigeria has a vast and varieties of tourism attraction all over the country and possess all the ingredients that can attract tourists from across the world and thus, ensure an efficient and productive tourism industry. Such attraction scenes includes the Yankari game reserve in Bauchi, the Bagauda lake resort, the Ikogosi warm spring in Ekiti, the Obudu cattle ranch in cross river and the Olumo rock in Abeokuta, Lekki conservation centre, Lagos State, Cross Rivers National Park in Cross Rivers State to mention a few. All these can make significant contribution to the national economy if adequately marketed. However, harnessing these potentials for the development of its tourism industry has been an almost impossible feat for concerned stakeholders. This is as a result of the fact that the tourism products are not properly marketed (Adejokun, 2009). Countries such as Spain, Gambia, South Africa, Kenya, etc had long recognized that many tourists choose their destinations based on marketing efforts. (Holden, 2008).

The World Bank has allocated over \$3.5 billion (USD) to tourism development projects in developing regions (Hawkins & Mann, 2007). Whilst the World Bank investment is indicative of the tourism industry as a viable industry, its development and sustainability still remains unclear in countries that have benefited from such investment including Nigeria (Ashikodi, 2012). In other words, contrary to the anticipated turnaround as a result of these huge spending by external donors, the country's tourism sector remains under-developed and continues to lag behind their counterparts in Asia, Europe and America. Against this backdrop, this study is set out to

examine the effect of social media on tourism marketing in Nigeria to aid in the rejuvenation and sustainability of the tourism Industry for economic benefits in Nigeria. Many tourists choose their destinations based on marketing efforts. That is to say, these destinations must have been promoted to create some sort of awareness to the tourists. Individuals, firms and tourism organizations usually promote these destinations/activities through advertising, publicity, word-of-mouth or other forms of marketing (Johnson, 2015).

Nigeria though has the ability to develop its economy through tourism, has been experiencing a decline in the contribution of the sector towards the economy. This is not as a result of lack of proper management and marketing of tourism products such as the sites, festivals etc. Again, the price is affordably fixed such that any class of consumer can derive as much satisfaction as they want from their tourism experience. In as much as the products, price and distribution are in order, the promotional strategies pose a challenge, hence, the need for the appraisal of a promotional strategy whose reach extends to the international or global community, and that is social media marketing. Marketing which entails a process of analyzing market opportunities and choosing such programmes that could support viable business options of tourism stakeholders. Contextually, one could say that the tourist's cape of the country is currently in a shabby or sully state and therefore requires strategic activities to change the situation to a desire one: one that will yield expected results or benefits as enunciated in the introduction section of this paper, a proper marketing through social media could be a way out.

The broad objective of the research is to reveal social media as a tool for tourism marketing by analyzing the usefulness of social media on the tourism establishments with statistical methods. The specific objectives were:

- i. To determine how social media could serve as a tool for tourism marketing in Nigeria.
- ii. To ascertain relationship of tourism marketing and social media to the level of tourism products patronage.

Literature Review

According to Carey & Font (2005) many entrepreneurs' fails to understand the nature of the tourist industry as a marketplace and assume that because they have an authentic and exciting tourism product, clients will find them. Underestimating that the challenges, as well as the cost of distributing tourism products is a key reason why new tourism ventures fail. Thus the process and tasks involved in an efficient tourism and relaxation management as identified by Carey & Font (2005) are first, conducting a thorough analysis of the market resources, competitors, and the tourism business environment. Second, borders on taking decision on the strategic choices of how to segment available tourism markets, determining the markets to be targeted, planning an appropriate product positioning and lastly, determining the marketing mix, which in the basic sense means how the product will be offered to tourists, the price that will be charged, how the product will be communicated, and how it will be distributed. The processes involved in these tasks, are comprehensively examined below.

The functional tourism system according to Weaver & Oppermann (2000) is based on supply and demand factors. The demand factors indicate that there must be a tourism market which could be in form of existing or potential customers. Such market may be international, national and local or a combination of all these. Equally, customers within markets could be general interest customers, such as holiday makers or leisure seekers, while others may be special interest customers with specific interest to satisfy (Weaver & Oppermann, 2000).

The supply factor stipulates that attractions and activities must be available to induce tourists to the area and such attraction may be natural in form of parks, beach, marine, archeological sites, and historical places. Cultural features such as arts and entertainment, crafts, traditional architectural sites, economic activities, traditional customs and ceremonies, man-made features, such as theme parks, casinos, special events such as festivals, fairs and sport competitions. According to Ducik & Stankovic (2009) these two major factors must be combined in a tourism and relaxation marketing process to provide for a match for different customer segments.

Many tourists choose their destinations based on marketing efforts. That is to say, these destinations must have been promoted to create some sort of awareness to the tourists. Individuals, firms and tourism organizations usually promote these destinations/activities through advertising, publicity, word-of-mouth or other forms of marketing (Johnson, 2015). According to Johnson (2015) tourism marketing has distinct characteristics from

other marketing plans. Since tourists are temporary, they are exposed to an area's goods and services in a short period of time. Due to the fact that tourists are counting on having a good time, it is important that tourism marketing should include marketing strategies that appeal to the emotions, such as treating kids to a memorable experience.

Egbaji (2007) noted that tourism marketing employs strategic marketing which entails a process of analyzing market opportunities and choosing such programmes that could support viable business options of tourism stakeholders. To achieve the goal of successfully marketing the existing tourism products, methods of forecasting must be employed. For example, in forecasting the demand for tourist services, first, the existing demand would have to be measured, as well as the number of holiday visits embarked upon, the propensity for such travel and the level of pressure at the various tourist facilities provided at the destination. Next, these figures would have to be broken down in terms of geographical region or market sector also taking into cognizance the estimate of total market (tourists) and the proportion to expect in future (Egbaji, 2007).

Concept of social media has been defined in various ways. Social media covers an extensive aspect of internet ranging from Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, E-skimi, pages on various social networking sites and all different content forming many other social networks (Eley & Tilley, 2009). Social media has been defined as the group of programs that relies on connectivity which allows the creation and modification of the content developed by the user and based on the principles of internet (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010).

Tourism sector especially in Nigeria should be able to apply the developments in the field of media to its own marketing activities in a way to record more success and generate more profit. Therefore it is essential to make sure that social media is properly used for tourism activities. For tourism sector to realize a huge profit from their enormous investment steady sales in the desired amount for the tourists is required. (Yavuz & Haseki, 2012).

Virtual marketing has different features than print marketing processes in tourism sector. Social media makes it possible for the tourism enterprise have a concise and direct communication with target without calculating the money to be spent on the advertising their products. Therefore, opportunities provided by the social media help enhance the efforts on marketing communication (Babacan, Kamanlıoğlu & Yeniçeri, 2008). Social networking sites have an important efficiency as marketing tools and assume many functions. Social networking sites are essential tools, where the consumers can get information regarding the goods and services, raise the awareness, have communication of word of mouth online, results, purchasing decisions, after purchase assessments and for the enterprises they are the tools, where they can market their productions, expand their brands and use in their customer relations (Albayrak, 2013).

Establishments gain a significant advantage over their adversary when they use the social media platforms for marketing purposes. Number of people that uses social media is increasing on daily basis and the fact that the number is high makes it possible for the information to be spread rapidly in a very short time to many people. So it gives opportunity for the positive information and report about the enterprise in the social media to be expanded with speed. (Magnold & Faulds, 2009). Lim (2010), stated that the tourists gets in touch with their family members, friends and co-workers on the social media when taking an independent decision on purchasing goods and services and this process led to promotion for the hotel managements. Social media is a place where people spend their leisure time, these sites are where the visual and audio bands are played. These sites make it possible for the contents as video/music and pictures about a destination to be over send to other users. Creating an institutional user name in means of marketing, presenting viable information through this source to all relevant people would both contribute to promotion and lead to important changes in the opinions of prospect tourist by serving as a source of information. Many sources spent for promotion would be saved with this source and can be spent on the other needs (Çakır & Yalçın, 2012).

Today, the level at which customers are sensitive to the fact that it is very easy and fast to share information and possibility of examining many comments in social media environment in the globalizing world, make it possible for tourism destinations or establishments to be assessed by the consumers in a most convenient way. Many potential tourists make use of social media as a guide for their travel plans. They visit relevant social media sites before deciding on the travel due to the fact that they believe the virtual assessment to be useful for their purchasing decision (Sarısık & Özbay, 2012). On social media sites there are various reviews, comments and evaluations that influences the creation of the label of the tourism enterprise, which can enhance marketing of the goods and services, increases the loyalty to the mark and the perceived (Wang & Hsieh, 2011).

Number of users of internet and social media all around the world is as follows; 2.5 billion people on the world use internet. More than half of these users have an account on the social media networks. Region with the least internet use in is South Asia (12%), only in 2013, 135 million people more created accounts in the social networks, numbers of active users of social media increases every year, facebook leading all other social media network with a number of 2.184 billion active users (Global Digital Statistics, 2019).

The ongoing development in communication means including social media sites of different types to achieve the objectives of business organizations. Moreover, the presence of many applications in social media has contributed to changing the conventional methods in marketing and tourism. The effects of social media sites on tourists include the following:

1. Providing the needed information to tourists about the touristic sites.
2. Benefitting from guiding the client as a positive consumer to the service.
3. Providing the tourist with secure passage to make necessary arrangement for their trips.
4. Helping in disseminating specific information about the trips and the changes that might occur.

It is clear that tourism companies and agents have benefitted from social media in providing specific information about trips, prices, and the offered services in an attractive and developed manner. In addition, these companies perceive the customers as an essential factor in encouraging tourism, and they benefit from them by providing sufficient information about the tourism sites through social media.

Social media sites are of great importance to those interested in the communication, information, political sciences, and social sciences fields, because of the prominent role of these sites in facilitating many events in the world. The experiment became clear through the Arab spring revolution, which used social media sites significantly for their ease of use and the ability to reach a higher number of people in different parts of the world.

A study by Ahmad (2015) revealed that the number Twitter users in the world reached 288 million users with an increase of 20% from 2014, it is expected to increase in the following years

Snapchat is one of the applications that has recently appeared in social media. It is one of then applications through which individuals can share some personal updates such as taking photos, exchanging video clips, adding identification, and others in a short period of time (Ahmad, 2015). The study concluded that social media sites have spread at a high speed, such as with Facebook, Twitter, and Snapchat, as a result of significant technological development.

Methodology

Research has been conducted gathering information from students of leisure and tourism department to define the perceptions on social media and tourism. Survey technic has been used as a method in the study for the data collection to be fair. Survey consists of two parts. In the first part, there are demographical questions related to the personal characteristics of the student. In the second part, there are statements to assess the impact of utilization of Social Media on tourism marketing. The survey used in the research consists of 20 questions, 7 of which are divided in demographic subcategories and 13 are 5-point Likert scale. The survey was distributed to 50 students in total.

Results

Table 1: Distribution of respondents by sex

	Frequency	Percent
MALE	22	44
FEMALE	28	56
Total	50	100.0

The total number of female respondents exceeds the number of male respondents. 56% of the respondents are female while the rest are male.

Table 2: Distribution of respondents by Age

	Frequency	Percent
18-25	31	62
26-30	18	36
30 above	1	2
Total	50	100.0

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	STRONGLY DISAGREE	3	6.0	6.0
	DISAGREE	4	8.0	8.0
	UNDECIDED	1	2.0	2.0
	AGREE	11	22.0	22.0
	STRONGLY AGREE	31	62.0	62.0
	Total	50	100.0	100.0

Table 4.2: Influenced by the positive reviews of hotel experiences on social media

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	STRONGLY DISAGREE	5	10.0	10.0
	DISAGREE	2	4.0	4.0
	UNDECIDED	2	4.0	4.0
	AGREE	17	34.0	34.0
	STRONGLY AGREE	24	48.0	48.0
	Total	50	100.0	100.0

Table 4.3: Influenced by the positive reviews of cultural festival and holiday destinations on social media

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	STRONGLY DISAGREE	8	16.0	16.0
	DISAGREE	10	20.0	20.0
	UNDECIDED	1	2.0	2.0
	AGREE	11	22.0	22.0
	STRONGLY AGREE	20	40.0	40.0
	Total	50	100.0	100.0

Table 4.4: Influenced by positive experiences shared about travel agents on social media

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	STRONGLY DISAGREE	4	8.0	8.0
	DISAGREE	4	8.0	16.0
	UNDECIDED	3	6.0	22.0
	AGREE	11	22.0	24.0
	STRONGLY AGREE	28	56.0	100.0
	Total	50	100.0	100.0

Most of the respondent strongly agreed 62% with the view of been influenced by positive review of holiday destinations on social media while about 22% agreed to this. Also, 48% and 34% strongly agreed and agreed respectively that they are influenced by the positive reviews of hotel experiences on social media. Furthermore, there is significant differences between those respondents that agree and degree with the fact that they are influence by the positive reviews of cultural festival and holiday destination on social media

5: The Importance of Social Media in Tourism Marketing

Table 5.1: Social media has significant impact on tourism marketing and product awareness

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	STRONGLY DISAGREE	2	4.0	4.0
	DISAGREE	1	2.0	6.0
	UNDECIDED	1	2.0	8.0
	AGREE	25	50.0	58.0
	STRONGLY AGREE	21	42.0	100.0
	Total	50	100.0	100.0

Table 5.2: Various social media has help lead visitors and tourist to the right tourism destination

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	STRONGLY DISAGREE	9	18.0	18.0
	DISAGREE	10	20.0	38.0
	UNDECIDED	3	6.0	44.0
	AGREE	17	34.0	78.0
	STRONGLY AGREE	11	22.0	100.0
	Total	50	100.0	100.0

Table 5.3: Social media reviews influences choice to destinations

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid				
STRONGLY DISAGREE	2	4.0	4.0	4.0
DISAGREE	7	14.0	14.0	18.0
UNDECIDED	2	4.0	4.0	22.0
AGREE	19	38.0	38.0	60.0
STRONGLY AGREE	20	40.0	40.0	100.0
Total	50	100.0	100.0	

In Table 5, most of the respondents 50% strongly agreed and 42% agreed that social media has significant impact on tourism marketing and product awareness. Likewise most of them 34% agreed and 22% strongly agreed that various social media has helped lead visitors and tourists to the right tourism destination.

Summary of findings

This study was conducted to reveal the importance of social media in tourism marketing, social media is very important today because it directly affects the tourism market. According to the result, about 90% of the respondents are youth below age 46 years, it is obvious that youths are affected and influenced by various comments on social media. Many tourists choose their destination based on marketing efforts social media, that is to say these destination must have been promoted at one time or the other on social media to create some sort of awareness to tourists. Furthermore, findings indicated that those into tourism business should make use of social media as an instrument when planning their marketing strategy. Most respondents about 84% strongly agreed and agreed that they are influenced by the positive reviews of holiday destinations on social media. This is in line with the conclusion of Magnold and Faulds, 2009. They concluded that social media gives opportunity for the positive about a particular establishments to be expanded rapidly.

Also, the tourists tend to share their experiences about hotel, motel, restaurant, travel agent and likewise they discuss meal and drink they had at those destinations through visual instruments such as photos and video on social media i.e various display will influence the decision of prospective tourist. Lastly, according to the findings about 78% of respondents agreed that social media reviews influence their decision to travel to a particular destination, this is in line with (Albayak 2013), social media is an important tool where tourist get information about tourism products, a medium where they can market products, strengthen their brand and use their customer relation

Conclusion

Social media is a tool for tourism marketing, regardless of the quality of a service at a particular tourism destination a slightest positive comment or recommendation can have a significant effect on the business. For this reason, tourism planners should use social media in an effective way by creating official accounts for their business and hire staff to manage those account. It will be of help to counter negative posts and comments about tourism enterprise, this will prevent the possibility of involvement of other people from this review. Social media makes it possible for the establishment to have a briefer and direct communication with target groups through web site, e-mail short message, forum etc. without calculating the money to be spent on the advertisement. Today, the increase of consciousness level of the consumers, easiness of share of information and possibility of examining many comments in virtual environment in the globalizing world, make it possible for tourism destinations or establishments to be assessed by the consumers in a cheaper, faster and easier. Many potential tourists use internet for their travel plans. Social media can be said to create a good situation for tourist to visit a particular destination in case of post experience share and it can be used as advertising tool. Tourism mangers needs to be conscious of the power of advertisement via social media to compliment print media and consider social media a new communication tool to provide best services to tourists.



Recommendations

1. Tourism enterprise should employ related staff and they should train on how to use social media platforms as networking tool.
2. They should be ready to nullify negative comments made through fake accounts and should deal with such threat to protect their brand image.
3. Enterprises should use social media as a good advertising tool as there is a high potential in this sense due to positive reviews of the guests.

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