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Review of Social Media Potential on Knowledge Sharing and Collaboration in Tourism Industry

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Abstract

Social media have revolutionized communication in tourism industry. Review of the current literature revealed that previous studies have examined the role of information technology in tourism, but still there is a lack of study to reveal how social media promote knowledge sharing processes. To this end, the authors review extant related articles in knowledge management in tourism. The purpose of this study is understanding of knowledge sharing in social media in tourism sector. Specific concentration is on integration of tacit knowledge sharing during pre-travelling decision making. Finding of this study contribute to researchers, organizations and policy makers in tourism industry.

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1. Introduction

1.1. Social media In Tourism

Tourism, a highly knowledge-based industry, is a consequence of current developments in information and communication technologies allowing the extensive use of the transferring and sharing, reusing and storing, and generation of knowledge. Tourism is also an information-intense industry. Thus, it is essential to trace

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transformations in technologies and consumer culture influencing the distribution as well as accessibility of travel-related information (Xiang & Gretzel, 2010). Recently, social network websites have played a significant role in marketing and tourism promotion in the travel industry worldwide. Indeed, social media make individuals enable to interact with each other based on their interests. It has also transformed the nature of communication among people, particularly travelers (Litvin, Goldsmith, & Pan, 2008). Social media, a group of Internet-based applications, exist on the Web 2.0 platform. Such media give internet users opportunity to have interaction and communication and relationship (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Today, travelers, especially leisure travelers, can decide on a destination through social media. Indeed, this phenomenon has changed the way thinking and making decision. Tourism industry should consider travelers' attitudes towards social media, and find approaches to popularize information available on social media. For instance, hotels can have interaction with their customers through websites such as, Flickr, Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter, and share information, modify their services or to refine their brand (McCarthy, Stock, & Verma, 2010). Furthermore, social media websites such as online travel community play a significant role in internet marketing and electronic commerce (Casaló, Flavián, & Guinalú, 2010).

Nowadays, Travel has become an information - intensive industry that makes travelers enable to have access to information easily through internet (Qu & Lee, 2011). Online travel websites help travelers to arrange their trip for themselves and gain knowledge - based information. The most important challenge in promoting a virtual society is the supply of knowledge that is the desire to share knowledge with other people (Reychav & Weisberg, 2009; Zhang & Sundaresan, 2010). Social media gives tourism industry the opportunity to understand and discover consumers' demands. By analyzing the comments on online communities such as Virtual tourist and Trip Advisor, tourism industry can achieve better understanding of people's desires, demands, and interests. Thus, hotels and travel companies can promote their quality when they know about their customers' preferences (Leung, Law, van Hoof, & Buhalis, 2013). Parra-López, Bulchand-Gidumal, Gutiérrez-Taño, and Díaz-Armas (2011) observed that travelers' participation in social media is attributed to their expected social, hedonic and functional profits.

Furthermore, Kasavana, Nusair, and Teodosic (2010) examined Facebook potential in persuading travel agencies to follow international electronic marketing. Several studies have demonstrated that social media are becoming highly significant in tourism industry (Leung et al., 2013). Furthermore, cyberspace technologies such as search engines or online travel booking websites, accelerate the information exchange between online travelers and "online tourism domain" (Xiang, Wöber, & Fesenmaier, 2008). Indeed, travel websites enable people to check the best prices, destinations and even flights (Shang, Li, Wu, & Hou, 2011). Travel planning process would be increasingly influenced by electronic word-of mouth from social media (Pan, MacLaurin, & Crotts, 2007). Hence, the use of social media in the three phases of the traveler's travel planning process including pre-trip, during-trip and post-trip were highlighted as the consumer-related research streams. This study attempts to investigate the role of social media in pre-trip processes of travel panning as a tool for knowledge sharing.

2. Literature review

2.1. Knowledge management implementation in Tourism industry

Knowledge management (KM) is highly significant in tourism industry (Shaw & Williams, 2009). In fact, it is known as a competitive tool in tourism industry (Cooper, 2006; Hallin & Marnburg, 2008). KM can provide customers with timely well-informed knowledge regarding travel cost, destination, flight, etc. Scholars in the area of information system are interested in investigation the function of shared knowledge both explicit and tacit levels. In the area of knowledge management, a large amount of knowledge is tacit. Tacit knowledge is the hidden knowledge acquired over a period of time. Thus, it is difficult to convey and transfer this sort of knowledge to other people. On the other hand, explicit knowledge can be codified and transmitted in a formal or systematic language (Davidavičienė & Raudeliūnienė, 2010). The relationship between these two sorts of knowledge led to the SECI model (Nonaka, 1994). It includes four processes: Socialization, Externalization, Combination, and Internalization.

As shown in Figure 1. Socialization (tacit to tacit) can facilitate the exchange of tacit knowledge through joint

activities: joining together, living in the same environment, exchanging thoughts, brainstorming, and sharing experience. Socialization also takes advantage of the tacit knowledge embedded in customers or suppliers by interacting with them. Externalization (tacit to explicit) involves the translation of tacit knowledge into comprehensible forms that can be understandable by other individuals. In order to achieve externalization, employees adopt information communication technology such as groupware and other team collaboration tools which contribute to the benefit of all participants.

Combination (explicit to explicit) is the process of systematizing concepts into a knowledge system, and it integrates various bodies of explicit knowledge (Chatti, Klamma, Jarke, & Naeve, 2007). Combination converts explicit knowledge into more systematic sets, for instance by integrating existing information extracted from databases and creating new knowledge. Internalization is transformation of explicit knowledge to tacit through activities such as doing or experiencing. Through internalization, explicit knowledge created is shared throughout an organization and converted into tacit knowledge by individuals and this tacit knowledge is accumulated at the individual level and can then set off a new spiral of knowledge creation when it is shared with others through socialization (Nonaka, Toyama, & Konno, 2000).

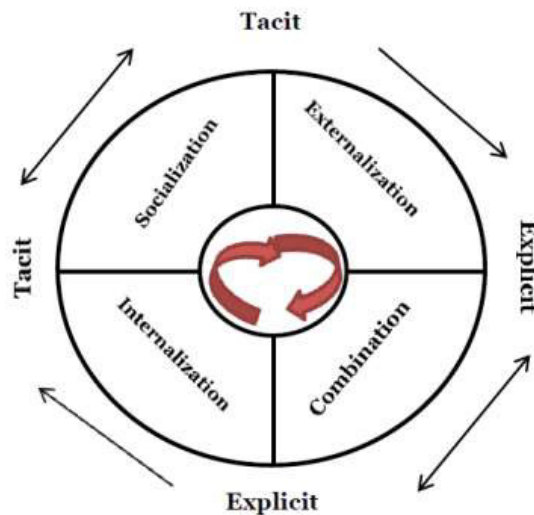


Figure 1. SECI Model- Knowledge creation model (Nonaka, 1994)

A variety of Web 2.0 services have been enhanced to provide approaches to support different levels of this process. There are different levels of interaction and “virtual socialization” among social media applications (Cascio, 2000). The huge number of SNSs users and their high level of interactions reveal that travel knowledge sharing on SNSs affects travelers’ destination selection and trip-planning behaviors. This also influences the financial performance of tourism industry. The conversion process expands both quality and quantity of tacit and explicit knowledge. On a Web 2.0 platform, socialization takes place when people or groups attempt to share their ideas, knowledge, experiences, and skills through practice, imitation, observation, and contribution in different social networks such as Facebook and MySpace that have been found to be the most popular SNSs (Shang et al., 2011). More specifically, the type of knowledge, which share in tourism domain, is tacit knowledge that relies on experience and practices. Social networking, particularly social media provide the opportunity for users to share their knowledge and experience.

2.2. Knowledge sharing in travel planning processes with social media

Today, knowledge is highly known as an important competitive asset substantially supporting and fostering adaptation, survival and prominent performance of an enterprise (Marques & Simón, 2006). Knowledge sharing makes an individual enable to share his/her experiences, insights or knowledge with other individuals. Thus, the recipient of the knowledge might use it to develop his/her performance. In other words, Knowledge sharing is an exchange activity among individuals, groups and communities to share not only their knowledge, experience and skills, but also their interests (Wasko & Faraj, 2005). In tourism industry, knowledge sharing points to a travel member's desire to exchange his/her experiences with other members. Knowledge sharing engages members of a society in different activities including sharing experiences, skills, knowledge and interests (Ridings, Gefen, & Arinze, 2002). People can be classified into two groups; one group includes those people who simply look for information assistance, another group consists of those people who are eager to share their knowledge with other individuals (Qu & Lee, 2011). A recent study has revealed that 84% of leisure travelers used the internet as a planning source that gives them information about flight, cost, and destination (Torres, 2010).

Today, websites containing travelers' feedback and comments are becoming popular. Thus, many researchers have considered the significant role of such websites in the travel planning process (Huang, 2012; Lo, McKercher, Lo, Cheung, & Law, 2011). Through social media, travelers share their experience, but knowledge and observations of their trip (Ana Maria Munar & Jacobsen, 2014). By the development of web 2.0 technologies, it has become necessary for industries to determine those technologies that have the potential to serve their long-term strategic goals. This development provides the opportunity for using the internet as an important tool for travel planning.

2.3. Tourist experience and knowledge sharing

According to Larsen (2007), tourist experience consists of three parts: the planning process, the actual mission of the trip, and memories of the trip. Pre-trip travel planning which is a particular type (and stage) of consumer information search is a vital part of the trip experience. Through pre-trip travel planning, traveler obtains an important amount of information to develop his/her travel plan. In this regard, information available to a traveler can influence different aspects of his/her decision making, particularly his/her decision on a destination to visit (Bieger & Laesser, 2004; Gursoy & McCleary, 2004; Xiang & Gretzel, 2010). Thus, social media help travelers to search, organize, and share their travel memories and experiences through blogs (e.g., Blogger and Twitter), online social networks (e.g., Facebook, RenRen, and Trip Advisor), media sharing websites (e.g., Flickr and YouTube), social bookmarking websites (e.g., Delicious) and other ways (Leung et al., 2013). Everyday Millions of people join travel blogs and websites to share their travel experiences. Thus, blogging plays an important role in the tourist production and consumption process. Furthermore, Web-based platforms allow 'real-time' recording and sharing of travel experiences (Ana Maria Munar & Jacobsen, 2013). Thus, travel blogs and website are a form of digitized word-of-mouth (WOM) communication that enables travelers to obtain insight from other travelers (Zehrer, Crofts, & Magnini, 2011).

2.4. Potential of knowledge sharing over social media to traveler's decision making

Social media are important in information search and decision-making behaviors in tourism industry (Fotis, Buhalis, & Rossides, 2011). Information acquisition is an initial step in the travel planning process (Chen & Gursoy, 2000). Several studies showed the significant role of social media in both travelers' decision making and tourism operation and management (Leung et al., 2013; Li & Wang, 2011; Noone, McGuire, & Rohlfs, 2011). The development of technologies in the area of internet-based social media has made travelers enable to share their travel stories. In fact, sharing information on social media websites is known as a significant source of information that can help travelers in travel decision-making (Zeng & Gerritsen, 2014). Social media can also be used throughout the travel planning process and even after travel for sharing experience. Increased usage of social media brings electronic word-of-mouth closer to traditional word-of-mouth communication which is still a crucial information source for travel planning and decision-making (Jacobsen & Munar, 2012).

Content generated as one of the main characteristics of social media means user created content may also wish to help other tourists to minimize risk in their decision-making. Risk reduction is considered particularly crucial to non-routinized and extensive decisions regarding the acquisition of expensive and complex products (Ana Maria Munar & Jacobsen, 2014). Although tourists contribute free of charge to social media platforms, shared information may have high commercial value. Trip Advisor and similar review websites benefit from tourists' emerging communities by exploiting their user-generated contributions commercially (Ana María Munar & Jacobsen, 2013).

3. Methodology

The present study attempts to explain the present status of knowledge sharing in social media in tourism industry. Thus, this study begins with a systematic literature review including articles published in knowledge management and tourism fields. Furthermore, in the literature review, the key conceptual streams are presented. Selected articles are divided into three groups: articles considering knowledge sharing, social media, and studies that covering both knowledge sharing and social media. The potential of social media as a tool for knowledge sharing in tourism industry is discussed.

4. Discussion

The rapid development of the information technology and Web 2.0 applications has profound impacts on tourism industry. This study discussed the significance of knowledge sharing in social media for sustainability and success of hospitality and tourism sector. Furthermore, the review of the literature revealed that information technology is highly effective in supporting knowledge dissemination, communication and collaboration in tourism and travel industry. Moreover, the significant role of social media in pre-trip travel planning and decision making was reviewed. It was also revealed that social media act as an important tool in tacit knowledge sharing. Consequently, Future research should investigate the most important social media application or sharing knowledge in hospitality and tourism sector in addition to investigate which characteristics of social media can enhance the knowledge sharing in tourism context.

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