



Role of Social Media in Tourism Marketing

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Abstract

This article established the usefulness of social media on the tourism establishments and its level of products patronage. Research has been conducted gathering information from tourism department to define the perceptions of social media and tourism. Simple 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. They present people with a countless array of internet platforms that increase and enhance the sharing of information. They make the transfer of text, photos, audio, video and electronic information in general easy. Social media platforms include Google, Facebook, Twitter, Youtube, blogging, Linkedin, Flickr, Whatsapp, Wechat, Badoo, Quantcast, etc. These communication modes have experienced a tremendous growth during the recent past years, and as they continue to grow, so is the importance of harnessing their contributions as marketing and management tools for businesses, especially the tourism industry, since the industry has long relied so much on the spread of information through the word of mouth, destination popularity and other forms of print media.

Key words - social media, tourism, advertisement, electronic information

Introduction

Social media has emerged as a powerful tool in tourism marketing, providing an opportunity for tourism organizations to connect with potential travellers and promote destinations, attractions, and travel services. The use of social media has transformed the way tourism organizations market themselves, enabling them to reach a larger audience, create brand awareness, and engage with customers.

Social media has become an important tool for tourism marketing in India. With the increasing number of social media users in India, it has become an effective platform for reaching out to potential tourists and promoting the country's tourism industry. A social networking site is a type of social media that provides a platform for people to connect with each other. Social networking sites are one of the essential tools that plays an important and beneficial role. Content on social networking sites could affect the marketing in both positive and negative ways. Social networking sites are originally used for entertainment purposes however an increase in the use of Internet and information communication technologies has shifted the way people communicate with each other, mainly in the hospitality and tourism industries.

People are connected with their friends and family through social media, specifically social networking sites. An individual is able to see what is happening around the world by sitting comfortably and with just a swipe on the screen or a click on the mouse. It is a good chance for the tourism industry that it can take the golden opportunity i.e. social networking sites to attract consumer through photos and videos of breath-taking sceneries. The followers or visitors of the tourism websites are able to look at the review of their consumers when loyal consumers upload their photos of the hotels, restaurants and destinations on their own personal websites (such as Facebook) which directly link to the tourism's website.

Naturally, travellers often base their expectations on other travelers experiences to get as much beneficial information as they can to avoid risk and also to boost up travelers confidence while decide on their travel plans. Digital mobility and social media activities enable tourism industry to have appropriate insight in the world of tourists. Marketing communications will be mostly concentrated on the improvement of relationships in social media and adapting to tourists needs. Social networking has also given the opportunity for the industries to connect with their consumers and employees in a quick and efficient way. The wide connection of social networking is a good way to spread information around the world, especially for business promotion and to build the image of a specific brand.

Here are some ways social media can be used in Indian tourism marketing

1. Engage with users: Social media provides a great platform for tourism businesses to engage with potential customers. By sharing engaging content, responding to comments and queries, and running contests and giveaways, tourism businesses can create a sense of community and build relationships with their audience. This helps in developing a loyal customer base that is more likely to visit the destination and recommend it to others.

An excellent example of engaging with users in tourism marketing is the "Incredible India" campaign by the Ministry of Tourism, India. The campaign aims to showcase India's rich cultural heritage, diverse landscapes, and unique experiences to travelers from around the world. To achieve this, the campaign uses social media to engage with users and build a community of travel enthusiasts.

The campaign's Facebook page has over 7 million followers and regularly posts high- quality visuals of tourist attractions, cultural events, and festivals from across India. The page also encourages users to share their travel experiences by using relevant hashtags and participating in contests and giveaways. This not only helps in engaging with users but also creates a buzz around the destination and promotes it to a wider audience.

2. Share visual content: Visual content is an effective way to showcase the beauty and diversity of Indian destinations. Tourism businesses can use social media to share photos and videos of tourist attractions, cultural events, and festivals. By sharing high-quality visuals, businesses can entice potential visitors to explore more of the destination.

The Indian state of Rajasthan is a prime example of using visual content to promote tourism. Rajasthan is known for its magnificent palaces, forts, and temples, and attracts a large number of domestic and international tourists. To promote tourism in the state, the Rajasthan Tourism Board has been using social media to share stunning visuals of the state's iconic attractions.

The Board's Instagram account, which has over 350k followers, regularly posts high- quality visuals of Rajasthan's landmarks, cultural events, and festivals. The account also leverages user-generated content by encouraging users to share their travel experiences and use relevant hash tags. This not only helps in showcasing the state's unique offerings but also helps in building a sense of community around the destination.

3. Use influencers: Influencers have become a popular marketing tool for tourism businesses in recent years. Travel influencers with a large following on social media can be effective in promoting tourism in India. By partnering with influencers who resonate with the target audience, tourism businesses can reach out to a wider audience and gain credibility.

An excellent example of using influencers in Indian tourism marketing is the "God's Own Country" campaign by the Kerala Tourism Board. The campaign aims to showcase Kerala's natural beauty, rich culture, and unique experiences to potential visitors.

As part of the campaign, the Tourism Board partnered with travel influencers such as Shivya Nath, Abhinav Chandel, and Savi & Vid of Bruised Passports. The influencers shared their travel experiences in Kerala on their social media accounts and blog, which reached a combined audience of over 1 million followers. This not only helped in promoting Kerala to a wider audience but also built credibility and trust around the destination.

4. Leverage user-generated content: User-generated content (UGC) is content created by users, such as photos and videos, and can be a powerful tool for tourism businesses. By encouraging users to share their travel experiences and use relevant hash tags, businesses can increase their visibility and reach on social media. This also helps in building social proof and authenticity around the destination.

A great example of leveraging user-generated content in Indian tourism marketing is the "#KeralaMoments" campaign by the Kerala Tourism Board. The campaign aims to encourage travelers to share their travel experiences in Kerala on social media using the hash tag #KeralaMoments.

The Tourism Board then curates the best UGC and shares it on their social media accounts, which helps in promoting Kerala to a wider audience. The campaign has been very successful, with over 200,000 posts on Instagram using the hash tag #KeralaMoments. The UGC has not only helped in promoting Kerala as a must-visit destination but also helped in building a sense of community and authenticity around the destination.

5. Provide travel information: Social media is an excellent platform for providing travel information to potential visitors. Tourism businesses can use social media to share information about destinations, attractions, events, and travel tips. This not only helps in educating potential visitors but also positions the business as an authority on the destination.

An excellent example of providing travel information in Indian tourism marketing is the "Goa Tourism" Facebook page. The page regularly posts information about events, attractions, and travel tips in Goa. The page also provides a platform for visitors to ask questions and get travel advice from locals and other travellers.

The page has over 1 million followers and is a valuable resource for visitors planning a trip to Goa. By providing accurate and up-to-date travel information, the page not only helps in promoting tourism but also enhances the overall visitor experience.

6. Run social media campaigns: Social media campaigns are a great way to create a buzz around a destination and promote it to a wider audience. Tourism businesses can run social media campaigns to promote specific attractions, events, or experiences. By using creative and engaging content, businesses can increase their reach and visibility on social media.

An excellent example of running social media campaigns in Indian tourism marketing is the "Dekho Apna Desh" campaign by the Ministry of Tourism, India. The campaign aims to promote domestic tourism by showcasing the beauty and diversity of Indian destinations.

As part of the campaign, the Ministry of Tourism has been running social media campaigns on various platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. The campaigns use creative and engaging content, such as videos, photos, and stories, to promote specific destinations and experiences. The campaign has been very successful, with over 4 million views on YouTube and a significant increase in domestic tourism.

7. Offer promotions: Social media can be used to offer promotions and discounts to potential customers. By offering exclusive deals and discounts on social media, tourism businesses can attract more tourists and generate buzz around the destination. This also helps in building a sense of urgency and encourages customers to take action and book their travel plans.

Social media has become an essential tool in Indian tourism marketing. By using social media to engage with users, share visual content, leverage influencers, curate UGC, provide travel information, and run social media campaigns, tourism businesses can increase their visibility, reach, and credibility. This, in turn, can help in promoting Indian destinations and attracting more visitors to the country.

Government Initiatives to Promote Social Media in Tourism of India:

Social media has become an integral part of tourism marketing in India, with many government initiatives aimed at promoting the use of social media platforms to attract tourists. In this section, we will discuss some of the government's initiatives and policies to promote the use of social media in tourism marketing in India.

1. Incredible India Facebook Page:

The Ministry of Tourism launched the 'Incredible India' Facebook page to promote tourism in India through social media. The page has over six million followers and showcases India's diverse tourism offerings, including historical sites, cultural heritage, wildlife, and adventure tourism. The page also shares information about events, festivals, and other attractions to encourage tourists to visit India.

2. Social Media Training Programs:

The Ministry of Tourism has launched various training programs to develop skills in social media marketing among tourism professionals. For example, the ministry collaborated with the Indian Institute of Tourism and Travel Management (IITTM) to offer a course on 'Digital Marketing in Tourism.' The course aims to enhance the digital marketing capabilities of tourism businesses to promote India as a tourist destination.

3. Digital India Campaign:

The Digital India campaign is a government-led initiative aimed at promoting the use of digital technology in various sectors, including tourism. The campaign promotes the use of digital platforms such as social media, mobile applications, and websites to promote tourism and make travel easier for tourists. The campaign has led to the development of various digital initiatives, such as the e-visa facility, which allows foreign tourists to apply for a visa online.

4. Public-Private Partnership:

The government has initiated public-private partnerships to promote social media in tourism marketing. For example, the Ministry of Tourism has collaborated with Google to create a 360-degree virtual tour of India's tourist destinations. This initiative aims to promote India as a tourist destination through immersive and interactive digital experiences.

5. Social Media Influencer Campaigns:

The government has recognized the importance of social media influencers in promoting tourism in India. The Ministry of Tourism has partnered with various social media influencers to promote India as a tourist destination. For example, the ministry collaborated with famous Instagram influencers to promote lesser-known tourist destinations in India. The influencers shared their experiences of visiting these destinations through their social media platforms, encouraging their followers to visit them too.

6. Online Campaigns:

The government has launched various online campaigns to promote tourism in India. For example, the 'Dekho Apna Desh' campaign aims to promote domestic tourism in India by encouraging Indians to visit lesser-known tourist destinations. The campaign is promoted through social media platforms, and tourists are encouraged to share their experiences through social media using the hash tag DekhoApnaDesh.

7. Skill Development in Social Media Marketing:

The Ministry of Tourism has also launched various training programs aimed at developing skills in social media marketing among tourism professionals. The initiative aims to enhance the digital marketing capabilities of tourism businesses, such as hotels, travel agencies, and tour operators, to promote India as a tourist destination.

Advantages:

Social media has transformed the way businesses approach marketing and promotion, and the tourism industry is no exception. Indian tourism marketing has increasingly relied on social media to attract and engage with potential visitors, and there are both advantages and disadvantages to this approach. In this essay, we will explore the advantages and disadvantages of social media in Indian tourism marketing, with examples.

1. Wider reach and visibility:

One of the main advantages of using social media in Indian tourism marketing is the ability to reach a wider audience. Social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter have millions of active users, and by using these platforms, tourism businesses can increase their visibility and reach potential visitors. For example, the "Incredible India" Facebook page has over 8 million followers and regularly posts stunning visuals of Indian destinations, events, and experiences. By using creative and engaging content, the page is able to attract and engage with a large audience.

2. Cost-effective:

Social media is a cost-effective way of marketing Indian tourism destinations. Unlike traditional marketing methods such as print or TV ads, social media marketing is relatively inexpensive. This is especially beneficial for small tourism businesses or destinations with a limited budget for marketing. For example, the "Gujarat Tourism" Twitter page regularly posts updates about events and attractions in the state, without the need for expensive TV commercials or print ads.

3. Real-time engagement:

Social media allows for real-time engagement with potential visitors. Tourism businesses can use social media to respond to queries, provide travel advice, and share up-to-date information about destinations and events. This not only enhances the visitor experience but also positions the business as an authority on the destination. For example, the "Kerala Tourism" Twitter page regularly responds to queries from potential visitors and provides helpful travel advice.

4. User-generated content:

Social media platforms such as Instagram and Facebook provide an opportunity for user-generated content (UGC). Tourism businesses can encourage visitors to share their experiences and photos using specific hashtags, which can then be shared on the business's social media accounts. UGC not only helps in promoting the destination but also adds authenticity and credibility to the marketing campaign. For example, the "Kerala Tourism" Instagram page regularly shares UGC from visitors using the hashtag #KeralaMoments. The UGC has not only helped in promoting Kerala as a must-visit destination but also helped in building a sense of community and authenticity around the destination.

5. Influencer marketing:

Social media platforms have also given rise to influencer marketing, where businesses partner with social media influencers to promote their products or services. Influencer marketing has become a popular way of promoting tourism destinations, especially to younger audiences. Influencers can use their social media accounts to showcase the destination and its attractions to their followers. For example, the "Rajasthan Tourism" Instagram page has partnered with several social media influencers to promote the state's rich culture and heritage.

6. Targeted marketing:

Social media platforms allow tourism businesses to target their marketing efforts more effectively. For example, by using Facebook ads, businesses can target specific demographics and interests, ensuring that their content is reaching the right people. This targeted marketing can lead to increased engagement and conversions, resulting in higher revenue and profits.

7. Increased engagement:

Social media platforms allow tourism businesses to engage with their audience in ways that were not possible before. For example, businesses can respond to customer queries, provide real-time updates, and share valuable content. This engagement can build customer loyalty and increase the likelihood of repeat business.

8. Cost-effective:

Social media platforms are generally free to use, making it an affordable option for businesses looking to promote their destinations. Additionally, social media advertising is often less expensive than traditional advertising channels, allowing businesses to save money while still reaching a large audience.

9. Improved reputation:

Social media provides a platform for tourism businesses to showcase their offerings and promote positive experiences. Positive reviews and testimonials on social media can improve a business's reputation, leading to increased bookings and revenue.

Disadvantages:

1. Fake reviews and negative comments:

One of the main disadvantages of using social media in Indian tourism marketing is the risk of fake reviews and negative comments. It is not uncommon for businesses to create fake reviews to promote their services or to discredit their competitors. Negative comments and reviews can also have a significant impact on the reputation of the destination or tourism business. For example, a negative review on the "Trip Advisor" page of a hotel or restaurant can discourage potential visitors from visiting the destination.

2. Information overload:

Social media can also lead to information overload, where potential visitors are bombarded with too much information, making it difficult for them to make a decision. With so much content available on social media, it can be challenging to stand out from the crowd and grab the attention of potential visitors. For example, the "Incredible India" Facebook page may have a lot of stunning photos and videos, but it may be difficult for potential visitors to navigate through the content and find the information they need.

3. Lack of control:

Another disadvantage of social media is the lack of control over the content. Once content is posted on social media, it can be shared, liked, and commented on by anyone. This can be both positive and negative, but it can also lead to content being taken out of context or shared in a way that the tourism business did not intend. For example, a photo or video shared on social media by a visitor may be taken out of context, leading to misrepresentation of the destination or tourism business.

4. Dependence on technology:

Social media is dependent on technology, and any disruption or downtime can have a significant impact on tourism businesses. For example, if the "Incredible India" Facebook page was to experience technical issues or downtime, potential visitors may not be able to access information about the destination, leading to missed opportunities for tourism businesses.

5. Short attention span:

Social media users have a short attention span and are often looking for quick and easily digestible content. This can be a challenge for tourism businesses to create content that is both engaging and informative in a short amount of time. For example, a video promoting a destination may need to be under a minute long to capture the attention of social media users.

7. Information overload:

With the abundance of content available on social media, it can be challenging for tourism businesses to stand out from the competition. Additionally, users may become overwhelmed with the amount of information they are presented with, making it more difficult for businesses to capture their attention.

8. Negative reviews:

Social media also provides a platform for customers to share negative experiences and reviews. Negative feedback can quickly spread on social media, potentially damaging a business's reputation and leading to decreased revenue and bookings.

9. Time-consuming:

Social media marketing requires significant time and resources to be effective. Businesses must create and curate content, respond to customer inquiries, and manage their online presence. This can be challenging for small businesses with limited resources.

10. Privacy concerns:

Social media platforms have been criticized for their handling of user data and privacy concerns. Tourism businesses must ensure that they are handling user data responsibly and in compliance with local regulations to avoid potential legal issues.

Social media has become an essential tool in Indian tourism marketing, with both advantages and disadvantages. The wider reach and cost-effectiveness of social media have helped in promoting tourism destinations and businesses. Real-time engagement, user-generated content, and influencer marketing have also enhanced the visitor experience and added authenticity to marketing campaigns. However, the risks of fake reviews, negative comments, information overload, lack of control, dependence on technology, and short attention span cannot be ignored. Therefore, it is essential for tourism businesses to develop a robust social media strategy that balances the advantages and disadvantages of social media, to achieve their marketing goals and provide a positive visitor experience.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the Indian tourism industry has experienced significant growth over the past decade, driven in part by government initiatives to promote travel and tourism. The government has introduced various policies and programs aimed at improving infrastructure, enhancing marketing efforts, and encouraging investment in the industry. These efforts have helped to create new employment opportunities and generate foreign exchange earnings, contributing to the overall economic development of the country. In recent years, social media has emerged as a powerful tool for tourism marketing, providing a platform for engaging with customers, creating personalized content, and increasing brand awareness. Social media has the potential to significantly enhance the tourism industry in India by providing a way for tourists to share their experiences with a wider audience, thereby attracting more visitors to the country.

However, the use of social media in tourism marketing also presents certain challenges, including the need for skilled professionals to manage social media accounts, the potential for negative feedback and online reputation management, and the lack of control over user-generated content. Moreover, there are technical challenges associated with implementing social media strategies in certain regions of the country, where internet infrastructure may be limited or unreliable.

Additionally, while the tourism industry has contributed to the overall economic development of India, it has also created challenges related to environmental degradation, cultural commodification, and income disparities between urban and rural areas. As the industry continues to grow and evolve, it is important for policymakers and tourism professionals to address these challenges and develop sustainable strategies that balance economic growth with social and environmental responsibility.

Overall, the government initiatives to promote tourism in India, coupled with the widespread adoption of social media, have created a dynamic and rapidly evolving industry with significant potential for growth and development. By leveraging the advantages of social media while addressing the challenges and concerns associated with tourism development, stakeholders in the industry can work together to create a sustainable and successful future for tourism in India.

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