TOURISM – EVOLUTION THROUGH SOCIAL MEDIA

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1. ABSTRACT: If someone have to choose an industry which have gone through most dynamic transformation because of social media it has to be travel and tourism sector. Social media has made people of reserved travel mindset go places. Indian millennial has changed the old mindset of being well read, now they say well read and well traveled. The footage given to traveling posts and pictures on any social media platform is immense and it has not only made tourism attractive and glamorous but also quite convenient, now one doesn't feel almost in dark about any destination one have a plethora of feedbacks and posts to relate to when planning to travel. This article discusses about how tourism has evolved because of social media, its importance the ways to be used by various stakeholders and changing travel philosophy in lieu to social media. It also discusses about most popular social media platforms with respect to tourism.

KEYWORDS: Tourism, Travel, Social media, Indian Millennial, Evolution.

2. INTRODUCTION

For the travel and tourism sector, the rise of the social media and the increased popularity of social media platforms have altered the face of tourism marketing. Traveling has become more of purchase of experience rather than any material possession. From the way that tourists research potential destinations to the various activities that they participate in once they arrive, the new ways that consumers use social media to make purchasing decisions has influenced tourism marketing from start to finish. Traveling has become both fashion and passion to many people, as they are more prone to travel now-a-days than any time in past. It has only become possible because of social media marketing. Tourism is highlighted so much on social media platforms that no one can resist to travel and also there are various dedicated applications and platforms tailor made for the travel needs which make a memorable experience for the consumer.

Social media has fundamentally changed the way that many companies communicate with and market to their target demographics. More and more tourism businesses are using social networking sites to achieve better position in the competition for the grace of tourists. For instance, creating a Facebook fan page enables different tourism businesses to easily, cheaply and quickly reach scores of people, interact with past and potential visitors, attend interaction with fans or even give opportunity for reserving their staying arrangements. Besides almost everyone loves sharing experiences about their vacations and these user generated content that is past visitors' positive experiences and stories are genuine third party contributions which spreads word of mouth and encourage others to visit. By analyzing the comments on the webpage, businesses are able to monitor and get better understanding what their guests like and dislike about them and even their competitors, which can help businesses to strengthen weaknesses and maintain and improve what visitors like charge marketing tool for all tourism businesses.

Social media has brought in a revolutionary change even in the mindset of prospective travelers now they get a glimpse of their prospective travel by the feedback and posts of their fellow travelers who have already traveled to the particular location now they don't have to go by the words of travels companies or travel agents, they can access live feed of that particular location to get a feel of what to expect in their travel itinerary.

3. HOW SOCIAL MEDIA HAS TRANSFORMED TRAVEL BUSINESS

3.1 Travel research

One of the most profound effect that social media has on the tourism sector till now is the democratization of online reviews. Travelers go online to research their future travel destinations and arrangements. While booking travel, most of millennial plan travel activities based on content posted by their fellow travelers.

Social media platforms such as Instagram to traveler-sourced review sites such as Trip Advisor, people are using the Internet to get inspired from the posts and also to validate the claims made by the marketer. There, they can easily find other travelers' photos, check-ins, ratings and more. This accessible, real traveler feedback helps to perceive about the real life experience that the destination has to offer from a viewpoint other than that of the marketer. This social media content is tremendously accessible and influential, and it can serve to either put off potential guests or inspire them to book.

Potential travelers are turning to social platforms to seek for support when planning their upcoming adventure trip. Documenting travel with smart phones and DSLR cameras has never been easier. Photos and videos taken while traveling are among the most popular types of content shared online, and the most popular places to share these are on the top social platforms. Travel research support has become a crucial attribute of any social media platform.

3.2 Rise in social sharing

Travelers have always loved sharing photos and videos taken during their travels. This love has been taken to altogether a new level for the sake of feel good with likes and comments on social media. These platforms have facilitated and expanded people's ability to share travel experiences

with a wider audience than ever before. According to a study by www.entrepreneur.com over 97% of millennial share photos and videos of their travels online, building an influential web of real life experience that serves to inspire potential travelers.

Earlier travelers had to wait for their trip to end to share their photos and videos to their family and friends but now days they can do so from start to the end by just posting live feeds even live videos and complete stories on various social platforms.

Noticing this trend, the marketers from tourism sector have turned to running social contests and campaigns to ensure that they get credit for their consumer's social activity and feeds. Various hotels and resorts also shoot random visitors by themselves and share those moments on their social media platforms thus inspiring other travelers to visit their place.

Social sharing has undoubtedly led to the democratization of online reviews with a lot of travelers using review sites such as Trip advisor, expedia.com, or booking.com, or kayak, etc. as a source for planning a holiday. These third-party rating sites host a plethora of genuine and unbiased feedback from customers as opposed to the viewpoint of a particular brand or the marketer. Not only this these sites also help its users to fulfill their self-actualization needs, for example being a Trip advisor has also become a passion to many travel enthusiasts as there are various level starting from beginner to professional advisor there are various badges associated with the same and Tripadvisor has a unique concept of making the reviewer feel important and trustworthy.

By integrating with hotel and flight comparison sites such as Expedia, booking.com and Sky scanner – popular third-party review sites also allow users to research and book holidays all in one place.

3.3 Enhanced customer service

Social media has certainly transformed customer service and taken customer satisfaction to a new level. The vast majority of brands have a social media presence that is being used to become aware of and, when necessary, to provide help to unsatisfied or confused customers. The goal is to leverage these social channels into a marketing strategy that creates brand awareness, sells more products and services and gets the brand closer to its customer community. The companies that respond to complaints in a sincere and genuine manner are more likely to create brand equity and they very promptly indicate to current and future customers that they are genuinely concerned.

Additionally, customer success representatives should be intentional with their company's social media interactions. Social media can serve as a social listening tool to find out information about the potential customers. Listening to customers through social media can help the brand create an exceptional experience that is sure to delight the consumers and develop a strong reputation among current and potential customers. Travel brands are now extremely active on a handful social media channels and promptly reply to queries or complaints. The immediacy of social media engagement has helped travel companies maintain and develop genuine relationships with their customers much faster than phone or email alone.

3.4 Reshaping travel agencies

Travel agency model has totally transformed after the birth of social media. The availability of information and ease of self-service booking have forced travel agencies to improve their services manifolds. Most travel agents have transformed them selves from brick and mortar to online as they adapt to new technology and social media market.

Agents working with travelers have started taking into account the generation's preference for "experiences over materials." Instead of trying to sell them on flight upgrades and accommodation, they consider presenting unique experiences which helps to create beautiful memories, going forward travel agencies may struggle to remain relevant as self-booking options increase, their advantage is that many travelers still prefer the personal touch even if they have to pay a bit more.

3.5 Loyalty programs

Acquiring new customers is far more expensive and tough than retaining existing ones. Marketers use this fact in the form of Loyalty programs. They have become core of the travel business model, and social media has had a massive impact on how travel loyalty programs are framed. Most of the customers understand that the feedback that they share on their social platforms a great influence on their entire network. As a result, these guests feel entitled to compensation for the positive word-of-mouth marketing that they are doing for a brand. No. of travelers that participate in loyalty programs are likely to post about a brand and they get loyalty points in reward.

Frequent use of such social platforms has made loyalty programs immensely popular and both the customer and the marketer are aware of this. Integrating social media sharing and posting can be worked into existing tier loyalty programs to encourage brand promotion across social media platforms. When loyal guests share the easy the redeem perks and benefits offered by a brand's loyalty programs on social media, other guests see that the benefits are attainable and desirable and there will be more incentives to participate. Taking example of Marriott Hotels incentivizes members of its rewards programme by awarding them with 2000 bonus points for referring their hotels to family and friends. In turn, newly referred customers are then awarded 2000 bonus points for each night for the first 5 days to encourage longer hotel stays.

Social media has altered the landscape of marketing in the leisure and hospitality industry. Most travelers determine their travel plans based on reviews and social media shares, making online customer service a crucial part of building a positive brand reputation. The popularity of social media has entirely changed the traditional customer servicing for hotels and travel agencies alike. By curetting positive reviews and encouraging social shares, hospitality brands can leverage social media to build positive brand awareness, increase brand loyalty, and display just how much their accommodations and activities have to offer.

The social sharing extension allows hotels, travel agents, tourist corporations, to collect valuable insights of its most engaged users by rewarding members who share valuable content get reward points when relevant hashtags are. There are loyalty programs that reward the traveler upon linking through various social media platforms like facebook, Instagram and twitter.

3.6 International markets

Travel habits and social media usage also have geographical preferences and social media marketing is also demographically influenced. Outbound travelers from the Middle East have a totally different set of expectations compared to their Western counterparts – luxury experiences are prioritized amongst anything else so it's no surprise well-established homegrown luxury airlines rate highly for social media engagement in the region.

International tourism has also become quite accessible after the social media rampage which we seen in the last decade, especially Indian travelers who used to travel inbound mainly have crossed the boundaries and gone for outbound travel.

3.7 Decreased Marketing Costs
There is huge difference in cost of traditional marketing and social media marketing as social media marketing is relatively very cost efficient and can be managed individually also through various posts and feeds. Social media marketing has evolved as convenient and highly cost efficient marketing tool, which is highly effective too.

4. Most popular platforms for social media marketing for tourism
**4.1 Facebook**
Facebook is the most popular social media in tourism social marketing. If one has the time and resources to be active on one social media platform, Facebook are the one to choose. Most of prospective clients and potential clients are already there, making it ripe for developing an active Facebook community around the travel brand. Some of the common tourism social media strategies are:
4.1.1 Posting drool-worthy images of fabulous destinations to inspire travel.
4.1.2 Sharing advice and tips to establish brand as a knowledge resource.
4.1.3 Asking questions and offering polls to learn about travel community.
4.1.4 Using Facebook ads to market exciting travel offers and Creating custom audiences of existing client list and use Facebook's powerful ad targeting options to reach prime potential clients.
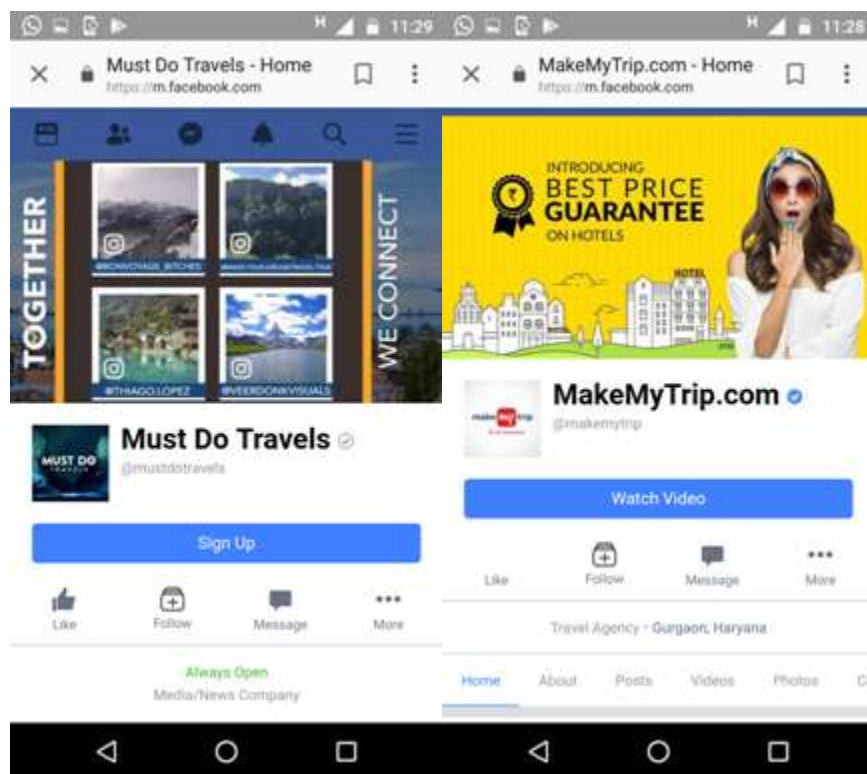
4.2 Twitter
Twitter is a lightning-speed social channel best for getting up-to-the-second news, trend spotting, and providing or requesting customer service all in 140 characters or less. It's a great platform for promoting original content because likes and shares propagate the post far beyond marketer's existing network. popular social media strategies are:
4.2.1 Sharing links to blog posts, info graphics or white papers to gain "Klout" as an expert and drive users to the website.
4.2.2 Participating in one of the many regularly scheduled group travel chats to grow the community and build relationships with travel suppliers.
4.2.3 Keeping promotional offers or sales to less than 20% (one in five) of marketers tweets. Twitter is more about conversation than outright selling.
4.2.4 Including one or two pertinent hashtags on each tweet to make it 33% more likely to be retweeted, and attach a relevant photo to receive up to 313% more engagement.
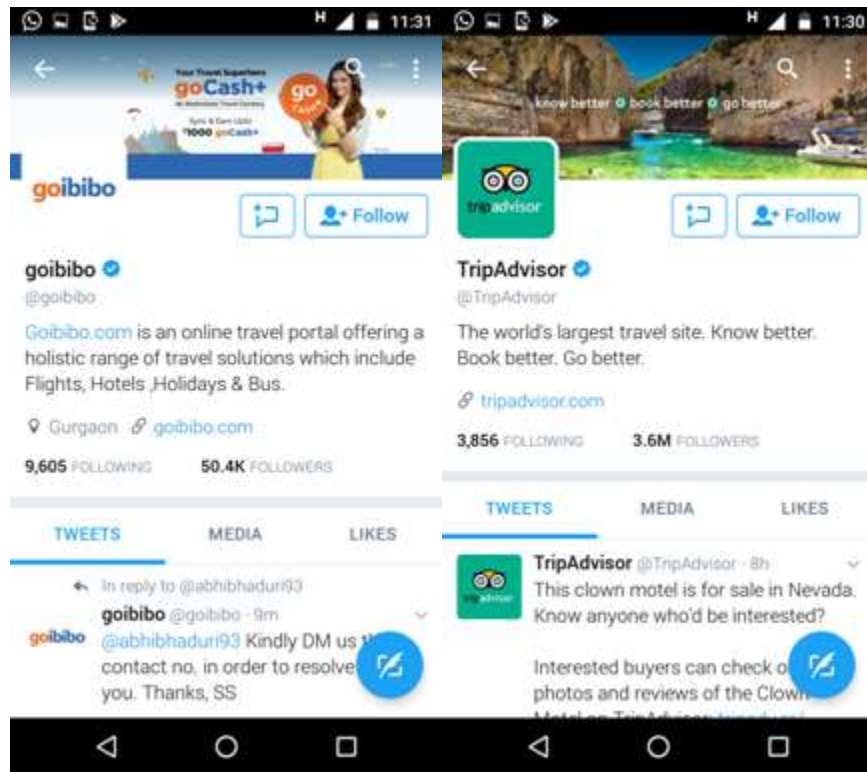
4.3 Instagram

If a picture is worth a thousand words, then the photo-sharing app Instagram can be an epic narrative to get followers dreaming about beautiful travel destinations. In fact, 48% of Instagram users rely on Instagram to find a new travel destination. Some Instagram strategies are:

4.3.1 Posting only high-quality images that will captivate the followers. Marketer must avoid stock photos and blurry images.

4.3.2 Sharing images from the staff's own travel to highlight the advisor's personal experience, and company events to humanize the brand.

4.3.3 Extending the reach by leveraging trending hashtags. Use up to 30 relevant hashtags (9 – 10 is optimal) to make the post searchable and visible to others using the same hashtag.

4.3.4 For efficiency, scheduling the posts with Hootsuite or Buffer. Instagram doesn't allow those tools to automatically post, but one can set up everything in advance, then post with a couple of taps on the phone.
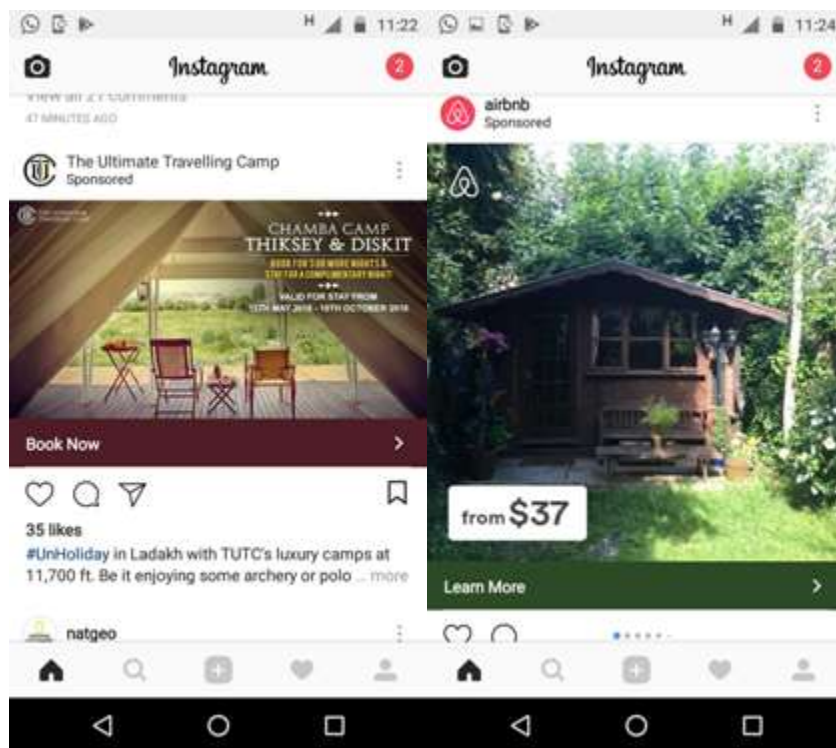
4.4 Travel Blogs

Blogs are becoming a very important information source for international travelers for getting travel advice and suggestions of tourism suppliers. Gretzel and Yoo (2008) have shown that "reviews play an important role in the trip planning process for those who actively read them. They provide ideas, make decisions easier, add fun to the planning process and increase confidence by reducing risk making it easier to image what places will be like". When reading and sharing one's travel experience through weblogs, this also creates the willingness to travel and visit the same destination. Several statistics support the influence of online travel blogs on tourist decision making behavior. For instance, Universal McCann 2010 "The Socialization of Brands" survey has revealed changes in the way that people are using the Internet to create and share information. The usage of different blogs in almost every examined area – especially tourism – has increased steadily from 2008 to 2010 as we can see on the second figure. Nowadays approximately every third of the people read travel related blogs for getting trustworthy information from fellow travel

4.4.1 Impacts of blogs on tourism businesses

Tourism businesses and destination management organizations pay even more attention to online travel blogs in order to (1) communicate with their guests, and enhance their loyalty, (2) create interest and appeal to their products or services, (3) conduct an easy, free, timely and reliable market research about travelers' preferences, (4) give feedback and maintain connection with current and prospective travelers in a very personal and informal way. Weblogs are becoming very important tools affecting information search since their links, content (using keywords regularly) and popularity influence the ranking of a company on search engines (Sigala, 2007). Despite search engine optimization it is vitally important to deal with the content of the blog. Blog posts should be compact, relevant and informative because of the fact that a regularly updated blog may help promote your tourism brand through the building of a community of readers and by increasing the number of search terms that may bring visitors to the site.

Other platforms that are a good fit for travel agencies include Pinterest, LinkedIn, YouTube, Google+ and Snapchat. Besides there are over 200 more niche social media networks!

5. Conclusion

Social media has significantly contributed to the evolution of the travel marketing landscape and the 21st-century traveler is no longer bound to the limits of a company website or travel agency. For the travel sector to continue its current success, it's essential that companies expand their networks across multiple social media platforms. Securing a high volume of positive reviews and proactively encouraging social sharing is crucial to building positive brand awareness and increasing customer loyalty.

Social media has slowly but surely permeated its way into the marketing strategies of nearly every business sector and the travel industry is no exception. These day it has become a fashion to 'check in' at any airport through social media or using a fancy Snapchat filter to show off the vacation. In case of a millennial, there is no way that they are traveling and not documenting every single detail of their travel experience. This is now a way of life. If it's not on social media, nobody believes of the tour.

Thanks to social media, people are traveling more and traveling farther than ever before. Social media and social influencers spotlight countries that once were unheard of, countries that people never knew about and activities that were once off-the-beaten path.
With the power of social media, the people that we follow help to shape what we do and where we go. These people are called influencers and travel companies pay incentives to them in return.

Moreover, these companies are also providing free internet to the users so that they can spread word of mouth. For example, "JetBlue" provides facility to use the Fly-Fi to upload a picture of the wing and clouds with the caption #CatchFlightsNotFeelings. JetBlue has become the first airline to outfit every single plane with free WiFi. JetBlue knows what is important to today's travelers and they ensure that they are ahead of the competition. Travelers crave constant connectivity; if you're heading to a destination you want to share your excitement, you want your friends to know your every move. If you're heading back home, you want to share your dope photographs and moments. Airlines like JetBlue get that!

Destinations have now adopted official hashtags, #ItsBetterInTheBahamas is The Bahamas' official hashtag, Jamaica wants you to share your memories with #VisitJamaica and South Africa wants you to #MeetSouthAfrica. Destinations know how important it is to encourage social sharing; more pictures, more interest. There are hotels now that cater to the social media generation; these hotels gift guests with free drinks and discounts if they include them in social media posts.

Businesses that don't adapt to the new travel industry are going to get left behind. If travelers don't see pretty pictures of any destination, no one is going there. They use social media in just about every stage of travel. They discover where they want to go on Pinterest and Instagram. They have ditched guidebooks in favor of traveling planning apps like Lonely Planet & Fodor. They are not booking through travel agents; they have Expedia & Hopper and travel hacking websites to get them that cheap fare. They use Instagram, Facebook, Twitter & Snapchat to keep their family and friends updated with their epic moments as they go!
Really social media has revolutionized the way to travel and made the world is more connected and smaller than ever before.

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