Influence of Social Media Marketing in Choosing Sri Lanka's Eastern Area as a Tourist Destination

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ARTICLE DETAILS   ABSTRACT

As the number of tourists visiting Sri Lanka got out grown, tourism related entities have begun applying social media marketing tactics as a means to advertise Sri Lanka. This study was conducted to fill a gap because there haven't been enough studies on the effect of social media marketing on the Sri Lankan tourism industry. The study then looks at the influence of social media marketing, social media marketing content, and social media marketing traits on travelers' choice of locations after they arrive in Sri Lanka. The conceptual framework was created based on the literature that was accessible after reviewing numerous studies that had been conducted in different nations. A Google survey questionnaire was used to conduct an online survey to collect data, and SPSS was used for data analysis. Study used a probability sampling approach to select the data set from defined population. According to the findings, there exist a correlation in sample of information, the perceived ease of use, and the electronic word of mouth and purchasing decisions. Perceived risk, however, indicates a negative correlation.

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Introduction

The tourism sector in the current Sri Lankan setting has developed into one of the booming industries, where new developments have been made to entice new consumer bases. The vital role that customers play in internet in many hotels has increased their involvement in digital marketing operations as a result of business-related activities. One of the most important business improvement areas in the hotel industry that seems essential in order to compete and even survive in a highly competitive field is the use of e-commerce. A significant milestone in the development of the Internet is the rising popularity of social media platforms that allow Internet users to cooperate, communicate, and post unique content such as blogs, videos, wikis, reviews, or images (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). Consumer-generated content (CGC) is frequently produced by online users on social media platforms (Gretzel, 2006). Sri Lanka has been noted as a rapidly expanding tourist destination in recent years, and the number of visitors has been rising over time. As a result, this research addresses the study's background in relation to the Sri Lankan tourism business in eastern area and aspects associated to social media marketing.

Literature Review

Several researches on difficulties related to marketing, marketing tactics, and forms of marketing for various sectors are conducted in Sri Lanka in order to expand the market. Shivany, Velnampy & Kajendra (2014, 2013) Velnampy & Sivesan (2012, 2013) Kajananthan & Achchuthan. It is a new method of relationship building and word-of-mouth marketing that emphasizes two-way communication as opposed to one-way communication (Icoz, Kutuk, & Icoz, 2018; Gulzar et al., 2022). Low cost, easy and free access, global reach, simplicity and elasticity, user alliance, community admittance, active customer relations, fast connectivity, and quantifiability are a few of the key benefits and distinctive qualities of social media (Elley and Tilley, 2009). According to research, social media and new technologies are now essential towards expansion of the travel and tourism industry (Ban et al., 2015). A rapid and extensive distribution and participation in social media by visitors and operations by tourism workers have had favorable effects on the nature of quality services delivered by providers of travelling services (Rasheed et al, 2015). Additionally, it was claimed that electronic media contributed to the establishment of brand recognition in the hospitality industry, giving that sector a competitive advantage (Yan Xin, Ramayah, Soto-Acosta, Popa, and Ai Ping's, 2014). Overall, the literature review of this study has been conducted following the guidelines set in previous research (Rasheed et al., 2023).

Electronic Word of Mouth (e-WOM)

According to Jalilvand & Samiei (2012), electronic word of mouth (e-WOM) refers to user-to-user communication on products and services that they are interested in. Modern digitalization has made a virtual environment termed as an e-WOM with no restrictions on communication or the information float around the world. In addition, the emerging trend of digital era gave rise to an electronic realm that is virtual world known as e-WOM. According to studies, e-WOM occurs on websites like Facebook, travel logs, and electronic forums, specially with use of portable electronic devices including smartphones. According to tourism business is related e-WOM has a significant impact. Prior studies on the impact of e-WOM on tourism industry decision computation conducted through. According to earlier research (Fakharyan, Jalilvand, Elyasi & Mohammadi, 2012), e-WOM is a key influence to attitude and behavioral inclination in utilizing social media.

Information

According to study, customers choose how much information they need by using social media as a platform because comments on the information on these sites often contain explicit knowledge (Angeli et al., 2013). Social media and its stimulus on purchasing intention of customers are the subject of plethora of research in past literature. Additionally, studies argue that social media websites are comparatively more successful at promoting tourism than traditional marketing tacts (Milano et al., 2011). Furthermore, researchers discovered that e-WOM extensivly from sources that travelers usually enjoy that is highly reliable than a e-WOM from unreliable sources (Mack et al., 2008) and that vlogs along travel reviews that exists online highlighting ratings having a positive implication on traveler's trust while decision-making by the tourist (Gretzel, 2006). Therefore, it is important to emphasize that tourist marketers cannot ignore this growth and that it is essential to adapt new procedures that are aligned with market intelligence provided by the social media platforms (Blackshaw & Nazzaro, 2006).

Perceived Ease of Use

The comments given by users who are presumed to be valuable are referred to as perceived ease of use. In terms of system usability and practicality (Davis, 1989). The value that general public have on using technology is reflected in perceived ease of use (Davis, 1989). In addition, perceived usability in social networking sites may reflect the perception users have of these platforms, which may help them easily achieve their goals (Lin, 2007). As a result, customers might proposedly empower the innovation usually if believe in being user-friendly and having interface convenience and simple to use. According to

research, usability is made up of features, structures, and user-friendly interactions between customers and service providers that meet customers' needs and expectations, particularly when it comes to information requests (Muoz-Leiva, Hernández-Méndez, & Sánchez-Fernández, 2012).

Perceived Risk (PR)
When an actual purchase transaction takes place, PR typically happens with online financial transaction threats (Kesharwani & Bisht, 2012). According to research, PR indicates consumers' knowledge of the potential vulnerability they may experience when disclosing their personal information to obtain information for purchasing decisions (Cox, 1967). Threats to online financial transactions are typically related to a perceived risk that interferes, particularly if the operation is combined with an real buying. According to research, the ambiguity around online transactions results from a lack of visible connection between customers, e-retailers, and service providers (Al-Gahtani, 2011), which has a negative impact on people's attitudes toward using technology (Dinev, Hu, and Yayla, 2009). In light of this, it is regarded important to draw attention to the security concerns associated with technological customization (Tanakinjal et al., 2010). Narrated that, PR is also thought to be a factor that has a major detrimental impact on people's attitudes toward using technology (Schaupp et al., 2010).

Purchase Decision
According to Brey (2008), purchase decision is the study of the procedures used when individuals or groups choose, purchase, utilize, or discard goods, services, concepts, or experiences in order to satiate their needs and desires. According to research, social media marketing content has a significant impact on how tourists decide where to go (Gaji & Brdar, 2014).

Conceptual frame work and hypothesis
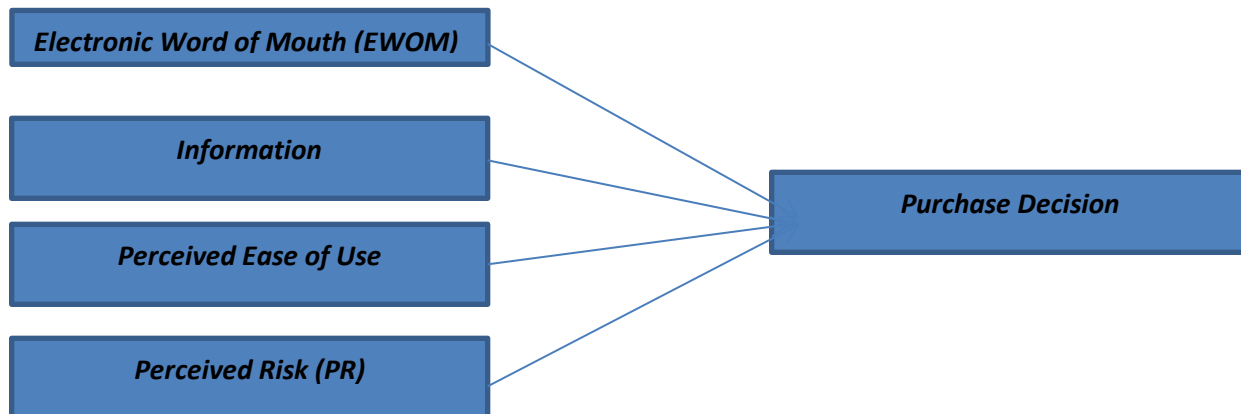
Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

The purchase decision has been recognized as the dependent variable in this conceptual framework's four variable relationship routes, while the four attributes that influence the purchase decision have been designated as the independent variables. Researchers have come at the following hypotheses that are consistent with the predetermined relationship paths:

Data, Variables, and Methodology

The research employed a quantitative paradigm in accordance with research questions and objectives. Sample used social media as a tool to choose customer travel history. The tourists visiting Arugambay and

Pasikudah as well as the managers and executive level staff members of the hotels in Arugambay and Pasikudah make up the study's total population. 379 samples were chosen using a straightforward random sampling procedure. Respondents are guests, hotel managers, and senior-level staff members in Arugambay and Pasikudah. These travelers were given the survey, and the answers were gathered. In order to draw a conclusion from this study, both primary and secondary data must be considered. The category of data that is most crucial is primary data. Primary data were gathered using the questionnaire approach. Each question relates to the research themes and provides more precise information. To build a strong questionnaire, historical literature was employed as a supporting resource. Travelers and hotel managers are mostly given questionnaires to complete in order to collect data.

Using the statistical tools SPSS 20 and Microsoft Excel, descriptive analysis and correlation analysis were conducted to reach the desired conclusions. Various analysis techniques are employed depending on the purpose, and the following Table shows the analysis techniques for each goal. Overall, this study has followed the guidelines set in previous research in the field of management sciences while designing methodology (Anser et al., 2020).

Data Analysis and Discussion on Hypotheses Testing Results

The exploration of sample demographic data shows that the majority of respondents in the age range 18-25 are backpackers, while the majority of travelers relate to age range of 26-45. Only a little percentage of respondents travel in indulgence, and the majority of are between the ages of 46 and 65. According to demographic statistics, the majority of respondents who work full-time are vacationers, while the majority of respondents who work part-time are backpackers. Additionally, more women than men responded to the survey, according to the sample respondents. Additionally, the majority of respondents have only had 1-4 or 4-6 years of experience utilizing social media as a planning tool for travel.

According to the study, only 5% of tourists or 18 respondents have arrived from Asian countries, which constitute the lowest number of visitors. Visitors from the United Kingdom make up 44% of the responders, while the remaining 51% are mostly from other European nations. The United Kingdom is represented by 44% of respondents, which is a sizable percentage. The findings on each purchase decision component demonstrated a high level of internal consistency. The table below contains the tested results for Cronbach's Alphas.

Table 1: Reliability (Alpha value)

Scale	# of Items	alpha
EWOM	5	0.781
Information	6	0.763
PEU-Perceived Ease of Use	4	0.729
PR-Perceived Risk	7	0.711
Purchase Decision	3	0.747

Source- Survey data (2022)

The study's main objective was to determine how social media marketing affected travelers' decisions to visit eastern Sri Lanka. The study focused more on being information, perception of risk, perceived ease of use, and e-WOM (electronic word of mouth) sustains Sri Lankan tourists' purchase decisions.

Table 2: Correlation Analysis

		E-wom	IF (Information)	PEU	PR
Purchase Decision	Pearson Correlation	0.421	0.299	0.292	0.018
	Significance. (2- tailed)	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
	N (sample)	379	379	379	379

Source- Survey data (2022)

Results of this study pertain that, it got evident that all independent variables basis a positive relation in-line with purchase decision. E-WOM stands positive relation with PD and purchase decision of customer is 42.1% effected by e-WOM. Moreover, according to the study information, PEU use and perceived risk stands a positive relation with customer purchase decision along an impact is 29.9%, 29.2% and 1.8%.

Table 3: Coefficient of Information and Purchase Decision

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		standardized Coefficients	T	Sig
		B Std.	*Error*	*Beta*		
1	(Constant)	1.617	0.289		5.695	.000
	Information	-.118	.060	-.118	-1.926	.056
2	Ewom	.244	.047	.294	5.044	.000
3	Perceived Ease of Use	.158	.036	.196	4.182	.000
4	Perceived Risk	.008	.025	.015	.275	.788

Source- Survey data (2022)

Probability value related to perceived ease of customer use and the E-WOM (electronic word of mouth) is lesser than 0.05, which forwards that the influence is highlighted, whereas the P-value of variable information and the outcome PR (perceived risk) is greater than 0.05, which signifies that the effect is negatively significant. All the data analyses have been conducted according to the guidelines set in previous research in this type of studies (Saleem et al., 2021).

Discussion and Conclusion:

Findings implied from this research are significant and of value. Study has important implications for marketing purpose and also the practitioners related to tourism and hospitality industry relevant to application and actions close to social media as most effective platform. Current research argues that

marketing executed through social media interactions and content obtained from this platform highly influences the purchase decision for tourist destination. The majority of poll participants stated that using social media marketing material would make choosing a holiday destination easier as well as that they would find using social media marketing content simple. Therefore, the emphasis of social media marketing strategies should be on making content accessible. In addition, the research study reveals that social media marketing promotes the flexibility of communicating with potential passengers. The study suggests that travelers typically read other travelers' social media evaluations to know which places make positive impressions on others. Overall, our study has offered implications in line with the implications attained from previous studies in the field of management sciences (Ahmed, Nawaz, & Rasheed, 2019; Anser et al., 2022; Chang et al., 2022; Khalid, Weng, Luqman, Rasheed, & Hina, 2022, 2023; Khan, Liu, Khan, Liu, & Rasheed, 2020; Khizar, Iqbal, & Rasheed, 2021; Rasheed & Weng, 2019; Umrani et al., 2022; Yousaf, Humayon, Rasheed, Ahmed, & Danish, 2014).

Additionally, the social media reviews of other tourists help travelers feel confident in their choice of place. Therefore, it is crucial to not only give users the option to submit feedback and reviews, but also to display those submissions for other users to see. Finally, by doing more thorough studies pertaining to the Sri Lankan environment, it may be possible to comprehend the consequences of visitor interactions on social media marketing and their influence on purchase decision. It is well recognized that social media marketing will continue to have a significant impact on all facets of the Sri Lankan eastern province's tourism business, and this study simply offers a few insights into this significant phenomenon.

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