

Roberta Minazzi

Social Media Marketing in Tourism and Hospitality

 Springer

Preface

The progress of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) has been transforming the tourism sector from the points of views of both industry structure and business practices and strategies (Buhalis and O'Connor 2005; Buhalis and Law 2008; Law et al. 2008). In particular, Web 2.0 and its applications (Social media), and a widespread connectivity, have generated a deep change in travelers' habits and expectations (Leung et al. 2013; Xiang et al. 2014). Recent statistics show that the influence of social media on purchase decisions is growing across all regions around the world (Nielsen 2012) with nearly 70 % of customers who hear experiences of other clients before purchasing a product. The modern consumers are more demanding and willing to actively interact with brands. They are looking for personalized services and engaging experiences with other customers and with brands (learn more about products, compliment brands, complaining about a product/brand). Furthermore, social media users are more likely to pay attention to personalized ads in the social media environment, according to their profile information (Nielsen 2012). Therefore, Social media give to marketers the opportunity to engage with consumers, becoming also an important channel for customer care: "Social Media Customer Care" (SMCC).

The transformation of demand habits is supported by the phenomenon of social media proliferation, along with the spread of mobile devices (smartphones, tablets), more and more used to access to social media (PhocusWright 2013).

Considering these trends, and the consequent even more significant power to drive the conversation with the firm that social media give to customers, it is more and more important for firms to synchronize with "social" consumers' expectations (Minazzi 2012). Therefore, travel companies should fully understand the influence social media can have on their strategies in order to develop appropriate approaches through an integrated marketing strategy.

The purpose of the present book is to analyze the on-going developments of social media in the tourism sector underlining the effects on the demand and the supply sides by means of the study of both main theoretical frameworks and practical business experiences. Following this objective the book is divided in three main parts.

The first part offers an overview of recent developments of social media and user-generated content. I propose a classification of social media trying to clarify definitions of different concepts, which often overlap (Chap. 1). Moreover, the evolution of electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM), along with main dimensions of analysis, is examined. Specific attention is paid to eWOM credibility and possible biased information (Chap. 2).

The second part provides the analysis of the impacts social media can have on tourists' behavior for each step of the travel planning process (Chap. 3): before leaving (pre-trip), during the stay (during-trip) and after the return (post-trip). In particular, reasons for sharing, dimensions of co-creation and main mediators of the travel experience are examined. This part continues with the evaluation of the impacts that social media developments, and the consequent changing in tourists' habits, can have on travel suppliers, at once, opportunities and a threats for tourism organizations. This ambivalence generates a perception of unsureness (Lagrosen and Josefsson 2011) that slows the process of adoption of social media (Stankov et al. 2010; Leung et al. 2011). By understanding rules and needs of a different environment, in which "social" travelers act, firms are able to develop appropriate policies, to be integrated with other more traditional marketing strategies (Chap. 4).

The third part of the book explores future possible trends offered by mobile technologies (Chap. 5), and possible methods for social media monitoring by means of main key performance indicators (Chap. 6). Information Technology progress and Social media spread, as well as Mobile Social Media development, contribute to the increasing availability of a large amount of multimedia structured and unstructured content about customers and prospects ("Big data"). The ability to synchronize with various target markets allows travel organizations to create a competitive advantage and increase financial and operational performance. Furthermore, engaging customers and prospects by means of social media might increase customer loyalty, foster electronic word-of-mouth communication, and consequently have important effects on corporate sales and revenues. The discussion of the last part of the book encompasses methods to gather, analyze and interpret Big data in order to measure company's performance on each of the social media and to understand the optimal mix that can support and improve business strategies.

My interest in social media marketing stemmed from the research on tourism marketing started at IULM University (Milan) during my Ph.D. in Marketing and communication directed by Prof. Emanuele Invernizzi, who generously offered me illuminating suggestions. My studies continued at University of Insubria (Como) where a cross fertilization of fields enriched my knowledge. I am particularly grateful to Prof. Giuseppe Colangelo, Vice-Chancellor and Director of the Degree course of Tourism Management, Prof. Maria Paola Viviani Schlein, Dean of the Faculty of Law, as well as to Prof. Laura Castelvetti, Director of the Department of Law, Economics and Cultures, for their support and encouragement.

The book is intended as a helpful reference work for researchers, academics, post-graduate students and practitioners in the tourism and hospitality businesses. It

will hopefully provide a better understanding of recent developments of social media and opportunities for travel organizations.

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Roberta Minazzi

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Contents

1	Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) in Tourism: Concepts and Developments	1
1.1	ICTs Developments in Tourism	1
1.2	From Web 1.0 to Web 3.0: Concepts and Definitions	2
1.3	Social Media Classification	5
1.3.1	Collaborative Projects	7
1.3.2	Virtual Communities	8
1.3.3	Content Communities	11
1.3.4	Social Network Sites	12
1.3.5	Virtual Games/Social Worlds	14
1.4	The Development of Social Media in Tourism	15
	References	17
2	The Digitization of Word-of-Mouth	21
2.1	The Concept of Word-of-Mouth	21
2.2	Word-of-Mouth and Electronic Word-of-Mouth	22
2.3	Electronic Word-of-Mouth Outcomes	24
2.4	eWOM Biased Information	26
2.5	Dimensions for An Analysis of eWOM	29
2.5.1	The Message	29
2.5.2	The Communicator	32
2.5.3	The Receiver	33
2.6	Recommendation Framing	34
2.7	Credibility of User-Generated Content	35
2.7.1	Reviews, Rankings, and Ratings in the Tourism Sector: The TripAdvisor Experience	37
	References	40
3	Social Media Impacts on Travelers	47
3.1	Consumer Behavior in Tourism	47
3.2	The Travel Experience	52

- 3.3 Social Media Influence on Travelers’ Planning Process. 54
 - 3.3.1 Pre-Trip Phase 54
 - 3.3.2 During-Trip Phase 58
 - 3.3.3 Post-Trip Phase. 59
- 3.4 Sharing Travel Experiences on Social Media. 60
 - 3.4.1 Tourism Experience and Storytelling 60
 - 3.4.2 The Dimensions of Co-Creation Through Technology 63
 - 3.4.3 Motivations for Sharing Travel Experience. 64
- 3.5 Social Media Users 65
 - 3.5.1 Lurkers and Posters 65
 - 3.5.2 Social Shoppers 68
 - 3.5.3 Social Media Users Demographics. 70
- References 71

4 Social Media Impacts on Travel Suppliers: Social Media

- Marketing 77**
 - 4.1 Recent Developments in the Travel Distribution System. 77
 - 4.1.1 The Role of Social Media in Travel Distribution. 82
 - 4.1.2 A Focus on Flash Sales and Social Couponing 84
 - 4.2 Social Media Approaches for Travel Companies 87
 - 4.2.1 A Focus on Customer Engagement 88
 - 4.2.2 Social Media Approaches 90
 - 4.3 New Ways of Interacting with Customers: From Information to Conversations 92
 - 4.3.1 Relationship Marketing 92
 - 4.3.2 Online Relationship Marketing 94
 - 4.3.3 Customer Relationship Management 95
 - 4.3.4 Electronic Customer Relationship Management in Tourism and Hospitality 96
 - 4.3.5 Social Media Customer Care 98
 - 4.4 Travelers’ Engagement by Means of Social Media. 100
 - 4.4.1 Consumers’ Engagement in Online Corporate Blogs. 100
 - 4.4.2 Well Begun Is Half Done: Give a Good Welcome. 101
 - 4.4.3 Engaging Content on Social Media 102
 - 4.5 How to Manage Electronic Word-of-Mouth. 107
 - 4.5.1 A Focus on Online Travel Reviews: Reply or not to Reply? 112
 - 4.6 Social Media and Communication 114
 - 4.6.1 A Focus on Facebook Advertising Tools 115
 - 4.7 Social Media Use Within Pricing and Revenue Management 116
 - References 119

- 5 Mobile Social Media Marketing in Tourism.** 127
 - 5.1 Mobile Technology Influence on Travelers 127
 - 5.2 From Virtual Reality to Augmented Reality 128
 - 5.3 Social Media and Mobile Media: Mobile Social Media. 130
 - 5.4 Mobile Social Media Marketing in Tourism 132
 - References 134

- 6 Social Media Metrics and Analysis** 137
 - 6.1 Learning from Customers: “Big Data” and Customer Profiling Opportunities 137
 - 6.1.1 The Evolution of Analytics: “Big Data”. 139
 - 6.1.2 Big Data Analytics 140
 - 6.1.3 It is Not Only About Technology, It is About People 142
 - 6.2 Social Media Metrics 143
 - 6.2.1 Foundational Metrics 144
 - 6.2.2 Business Value Metrics 145
 - 6.2.3 Outcome Metrics. 145
 - 6.2.4 Counting Metrics. 148
 - 6.3 Sentiment Analysis 149
 - 6.4 A Focus on Facebook Insights. 151
 - 6.5 Privacy Implications. 160
 - References 161