Harnessing Social Media in Hospitality Industry

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Abstract

In the era of digital media this is right time for hospitality companies to utilize the power of social media not only for branding, marketing but also to increase the customer engagement which improves customer satisfaction and lead generation and retention. As per statistica.com records we have more than 2 billion active users on Facebook from all parts of the globe, with this huge user base of Facebook there would be incredible benefits can be accrued by the companies that can effectively use social media. Hospitality industries can utilise social media for conveying information about their brand, active engagement of customers in the form of reviews and proactively managing customer grievances by giving immediate response. This is very much applicable for travel and hospitality companies, as per the inclination of the people to use social media for researching their vacation destination, sharing their vacation experience, and reviewing the places they have travelled or stayed. This paper explains the use of social media by the hospitality industry.

Keywords:

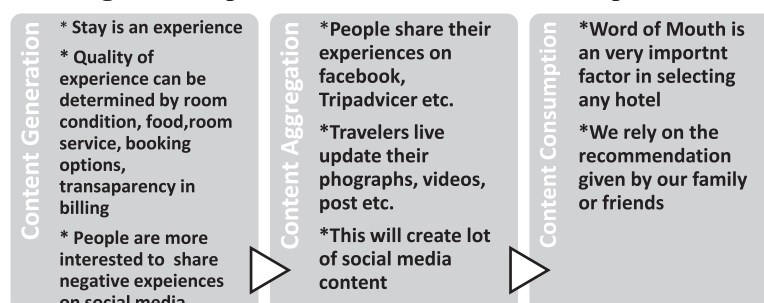Customer Satisfaction, Facebook, Branding, Customer Grievances Management, Customer Engagement

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Introduction

As per the commonly known theory 'Six Degrees of Separation' explains that any two people in the world, no matter how geographically distant, could contact and be acquainted with each other through a maximum of five intermediate people, or links. Time and money to connect with anybody has reduced considerably by invention of the telephone and the start of air travel. As per the data shared by statistica.com on an average more than two hours' people are actively using social media, if hotels can utilize these two hours effectively it will improve their digital footprints and by utilizing data created by customers' posts, likes and other digital activities hotels can derive various valuable insights. Analysis based on customer reviews will help hotels to develop personalized and valuable customer experiences with help them to cater the competition.

There are various social networking sites used by customers for sharing their travel experiences like TripAdvisor, Tripto, Expedia, HolidayIQ, TravelGuru and many more, it is very much advisable for hotels to utilize social media. Most of the good hotels now understood the power of social media as they have dedicated teams that monitor social media conversations on a daily basis, and they have designed very prompt customer response system for various issues and feedback related to any incident or service. Social media can grow and at the same time can diminish any brand as social media is an open system anybody is free to write anything about anybody so it very important to manage conversations on social media to maintainthe brand image of a company.

Figure 1: Impact of Social Media of Hotel Reputation

Content Generation
* Stay is an experience
* Quality of experience can be determined by room condition, food,room service, booking options, transaparency in billing
* People are more interested to share negative expeiences on social media

Content Aggregation
*People share their experiences on facebook, Tripadvicer etc.
*Travelers live update their phographs, videos, post etc.
*This will create lot of social media content

Content Consumption
*Word of Mouth is an very importnt factor in selecting any hotel
*We rely on the recommendation given by our family or friends

Different social media platforms are used to for share different types of information, in case of hotel industry YouTube can be used to videos to showcase various amenities in the hotel, virtual tours of the facilities, interviews of guest about their experiences etc. Social media platforms such as Flickr and Pinterest can be utilized to upload images of the different areas of the hotel and surrounding. Social networking sites like Facebook can be used to run some sort of campaigns in order to give promotional offers, discounts. The information shared on social media helps in decision-making for potential travellers, as information is shared in real-time.

An example of using social channels effectively can be seen at the Sayaji Hotel in Indore, whose social media strategy includes:

Blog, www.sayajihotels.com/blog, which includes details about the city as well as various dining options available.

The hotel invites users to visit the blog via Facebook and Twitter.

Instagram Page they regularly post pictures related to different parties and celebrations hosted by Hotel.

Twitter and Facebook accounts that are regularly monitored for guest comments, with responses provided within a short timeframe. Twitter is also used to communicate information and deals

Sayaji Hotels believes in collaborative approach, the content which they posted on various social media platforms comes from both the staff and guest.

Application of Social media in Sayaji Group of Hotels

Marketing: Use social media platforms to share information like videos on YouTube, photographs on Instagram, updates on Whatsapp and Facebook, etc.

Figure 2: Event promotion on Facebook

Customer Engagement: active customer engagement in the form of contest and games various social media platforms.

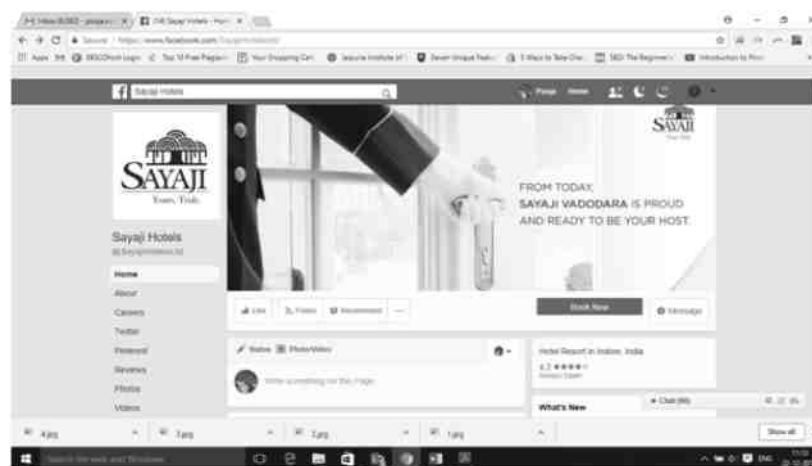**Figure 3: Contest and games**

Just-in Time Marketing: Real time personalised marketing deals and offers.

Figure 4: Marketing on Social Media

Extended Service: Customers can avail service by using social media platforms like Facebook and twitter.

Figure 5: Booking option on Facebook Page

Research Objective

The objective of this study is to understand the use of social media networking sites in hospitality industry. Social media is a newer concept and now very important constituent of integrated marketing and communication tool of any organization. Use of social media sites in hospitality industry is still in nascent stage, it helps to retain long term relationships with guests by providing all the information and getting instantaneous feedback from the customers as well as to earn revenue in terms of customer retention and satisfaction.

Review of literature

The new technology such as social media has changed the marketing strategies of hotel industry Manish Verma (2018). Due to features like interactivity and accessibility makes it one of thecost effective marketing tool. Many hospitality organisations like hotels and restaurants have used online communities as a new marketing channel to reach and cater their consumers' requirements Juhee Kang (2011).FMCG companies consider social media together with traditional media as an effective marketing communications tool Baisakhi Banerjee (2015). To cater competition, hoteliers

needs to redesign and align their strategies in order to fulfils customer requirement Daniel Leung and et.al (2012) explain various studies as per his article consumer-centric studies focused on the use and impact of social media and supplier-related studies have focused on promotion. Research findings demonstrated the strategic importance of social media for tourism industry. The importance of social media in search results. This study explained the importance of social media in the online tourism domain, and difference between offline information and online information shared by social media platforms Zheng Xiang and Gretzel (2010). Role social media in tourism is still in budding stage. It is very important to encourage use of social media in marketing of any tourism destinations Benxiang Zeng and Rolf Gerritsen (2014). Social media sites provide facility for user-generated content, such content can be used as primary information source for both consumers and businesses Wenjing Duan, Yang Yu , Qing Cao , and Stuart Levy(2015).

Difference between traditional WOM and electronic WOM (e-WOM) is that e-WOM spreads faster as compare to traditional WOM; because e VOM is easy to share with hundreds, thousands, or even millions of people through various social media sites and apps like e-mail, Facebook posts, WhatsApp messages or other Internet-based media Prendergast, Ko, and Yuen (2010). Consumers now regularly share information about restaurants through Yelp and other review communities like Trip Advisor and Menu Pages for that reason, encouraging offline WOM should always be considered as well as part of an effective restaurant marketing communication strategy Fogel (2010).

Blogs are considered to be very important social media tool for hospitality industry. Customer decision about hotel booking was influenced by both positive as well as negative reviews on the blogs, so hotels must have some kind of mechanism to monitor social media sites Manal Bennaciri (2012). Now Generation-Z becoming the part of growing consumer base, and these people are 24 X 7 on social media so if businesses that would utilize the power of social media would surely flourish in the near future Gaurav Seth

(2012).The hotels in Vienna do not measure return on investment of social media usage in terms of financial figures but they give more emphasis on customer satisfaction, engagement, and brand awareness as an attributes of return on investment Benea (2014).

Social media has been recognized as one of the important competitive tools in terms of tourism marketing. Tourism organizations need to engage their tourists with multichannel integrated communications channels and encourage them to share their experiences Radmila(2014). To better utilize the power of social media communication, the communication on social media needs to be more casual and engaging than traditional media Gavin Fox and Pedro Longart (2016). Facebook page of a hotel is used to engage existing customers and at the same time attract new consumers Samaan Al-Msallam and Abdullah Alhaddad (2016). The social media is a good business strategy for tourism industry to improve the quality as well as revenue of the business Rashmi Gururaja (2015).

Social Media usage by different hotels

Hotel Trident Twitter Campaign: This campaign was conducted in Mumbai's Hotel Trident at BKC; the duration of this campaign was two days from 29th March 2014 – 30th March 2014. They invited 3 social media Influencers to participate in this campaign, in this they had to spend the two days in the hotel using Twitter & Instagram to avail all the facilities of the hotel by using the hashtag #TridentSocialHotel. There were two quick activities around this campaign – the #Tweesurehunt and #Instachallenge. In the #Tweesurehunt task they were given clues, they have to search answers which are in hotel itself they needed to reach each destination in order to unlock the next clue. In the #Instachallenge, they were tweeted the clues and needed to click pictures with them. As per Prasanjeet Dutta Baruah, VP Marketing, they have three objective with this mainly reach out to the community who like travelling, dining, trying different cuisines, active engagement of customers and last but not least the content generation on social media.

Figure 6: Use of Social Media by Trident Group of Hotels

ITC hotels on Instagram: engage customers on various contests on Instagram.

Figure 7: Presence of ITC Group of Hotels on Social Media
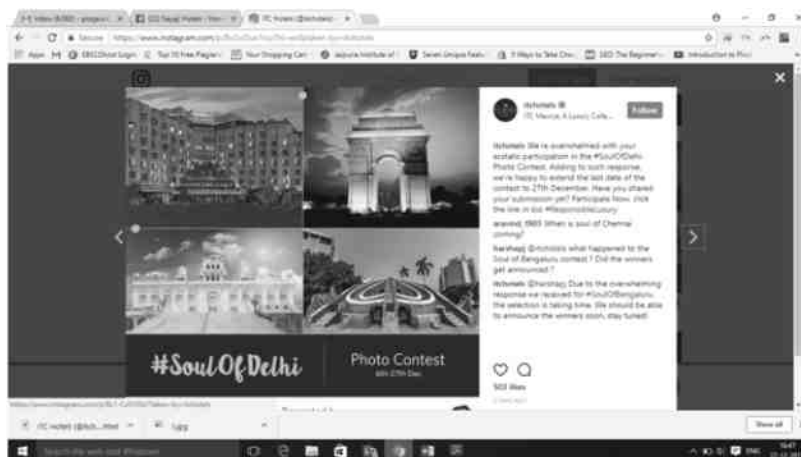
ITC Hotels on LinkedIn: network and engage with the corporate clients on professional social media platform like LinkedIn.
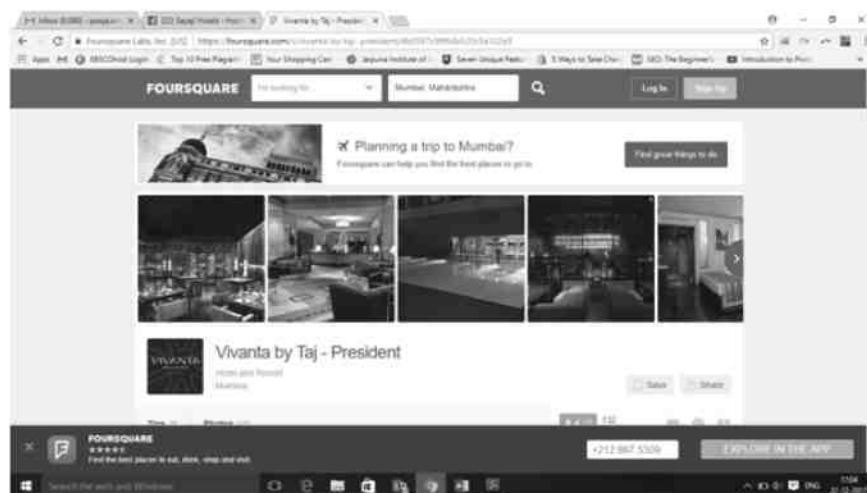
Figure 8: LinkedIn Page of ITC Group of Hotels

Vivanta by Taj on Foursquare: hotels use to promote their brand on social media platform like Foursquare which helps to find the perfect places to go with friends, discover the best food, nightlife, and entertainment in area preferred by you.

Figure 9: Presence of Vivanta by Taj on Foursquare

Managing Negative comments

Figure 9: Grievance handing on Social Media platform

Optimizing Social Media Channels

Each social media channel or platform has its own positive and negative features, social media marketing team of a hotel must use the platform as per their organization objectives and requirements. Table 1 provides a list of the most suitable applications and corresponding best practices for some of the most popular social media channels and platforms.

Table 1: Optimization of various Social Media platforms

Social Media Platform	Characteristics	Suitable application	Best Practices
Facebook	• User friendly environment • Most popular social media platform	• Update about the organization • Promotion in the form various activities like Contests, events etc.	• Restricted to add too long post or too much. • Regular update • Incorporate reservation facility on Facebook Page
Twitter	• Good to post brief post • Mostly used by business travellers	• Posting last-minute deals and offers. • Quick Response to criticism and resolving crisis situations.	• Fast response is desired
Instagram	• Good way to promote in the form of pictures • Various filters can be used while clicking pictures so can be used for promotion. • Prominently used by youth	• Showcase hotel ambience, reviews and facilities	• Engagement is quiet high
YouTube	• High level of user engagement on visuals. • Low-cost marketing, with user-initiated viewing of content. • Part of Organic search results of Google.	• User engagement • Fast information dissemination (Facility videos). • Guest feedback in the form of videos	• Indirect marketing
TripAdvisor	• Reviews of hotels • Quality of review	• Acknowledging positive reviews of customers by giving them some credit points which they can redeem in the form of stay or dine. • Active grievance handling.	• Regular watch of these sites, and address all sort of comments. • Avoid responding to not very specific critical reviews.

Discussion

The digital communication technologies like social media provide huge opportunities for hotels to make their marketing and service efforts more effective. Social Media marketing planning of hotels must start by clearly defining the objectives of their social media strategy; after defining objectives need to decide on social media channels on which the company needs to focus. Guest Analytics can be very much fruitful for hotels to decide on any social media platform. After proper analysis hotels can deliver unique and customized customer experiences that facilitate improves consumer satisfaction which leads to loyalty and results into generating more profitable interactions and transactions. In today's digital era when people trust more on the data which is digital available if the hotels are not focusing on digital social relationship with their customers would be less relevant as compare to who are more socially connected with their customers.

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