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Nina Mistilis

University of New South Wales

Ulrike Gretzel

University of Vienna, ugretzel@uow.edu.au

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Abstract

Given that SM is one of the "mega trends" that has significantly impacted the tourism system, this paper aims to provide an initial analysis for tourism operators in Australia in terms of the degrees of sophistication of SM adoption. A survey of 2172 tourism operators in Australia across five industry sectors revealed that two thirds had a Social Media site presence. However, in terms of sophistication measured by number of sites on which they had a presence, their updating frequency of site contents and monitoring the number and level of consumer engagement, the results indicated the level of sophistication could be improved.

Keywords

analysis, preliminary, social, degrees, australia, sophistication, operators, media, tourism, adoption

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DEGREES OF SOPHISTICATION IN SOCIAL MEDIA ADOPTION FOR TOURISM OPERATORS IN AUSTRALIA – A PRELIMINARY ANALYSIS

Nina Mistilis
University of New South Wales

Ulricke Gretzel
University of Wollongong

ABSTRACT

Given that SM is one of the “mega trends” that has significantly impacted the tourism system, this paper aims to provide an initial analysis for tourism operators in Australia in terms of the degrees of sophistication of SM adoption. A survey of 2172 tourism operators in Australia across five industry sectors revealed that two thirds had a Social Media site presence. However, in terms of sophistication measured by number of sites on which they had a presence, their updating frequency of site contents and monitoring the number and level of consumer engagement, the results indicated the level of sophistication could be improved.

Keywords: social media; digital adoption; tourism operators

INTRODUCTION

Social media (SM), often known interchangeably as Web 2.0, allow digital communication between consumers, in essence acting as the digital version of word – of – mouth communication. They ‘harness the bidirectional communication capabilities of the Internet to engineer large-scale, word-of-mouth networks’ (Dellarocas, 2003 p 1047). They also have introduced an element of trust so that consumers now increasingly rely on opinions posted on such systems in making various decisions. In tourism consumers may post and/or gather information and/or experiences pre, within and post trip. Social media are now also increasingly used by tourism operators to enable and contribute to these online conversations.

Social media include blogs, social networks, content communities, forum/bulletin boards and content aggregators (Constantinides and Fountain, 2008). For tourism and other organisations SM provide a means to capture and analyse data and respond in terms of monitoring consumer trends and managing performance for their business. Schegg et al. (2008) examine Web 2.0 use of DMOs, mountain railways, travel agencies and hotel organisations. Some studies specifically focus on SM uptake and use for hotels in Hong Kong (Chan & Guillet 2011) and for DMOs (Hays et al, 2013 and Munar, 2012) or a restaurant (Derham et al, 2011).

Tourism studies stress the importance of considering what is meant by “adoption” as businesses might 1) initially use a tool and then abandon its use or 2) be present in for example SNS but actually do not use the applications. In addition, technology use might not be tied to performance measurement. The nature and volume of SM data make performance monitoring a challenging, difficult undertaking (Mayeh, Scheepers and Valos, 2012); this is especially so for small businesses which maybe inadequately resourced. Therefore whilst SM adoption provides organisations with the potential to analyse data the

extent and nature of their analyses would be one measure of degrees of sophistication of their adoption. Given that SM is one of the “mega trends” that has significantly impacted the tourism system (Leung et al, 2013) this paper aims to provide an initial analysis for tourism operators in Australia in terms of the degrees of sophistication of SM adoption.

METHOD

Empirical data for this study was collected during May and June 2013 for the digital uptake benchmark survey of tourism operators in Australia, using CATI (Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing) across the Australian population of randomly selected businesses and organisations in select industry sectors associated with tourism, namely Accommodation, Dining, Attractions, Tours and Hire/Transport and an online survey of ATDW (Australian Tourism Data Warehouse) members in those sectors; these resulted in 1200 and 972 respondents respectively – a total of 2172 (Tourism Research Australia, 2013). The data were analysed using SPSS for cross tabulations and logistic regression.

RESULTS

About seven tenths of respondents had an official presence on SM, with about three quarters of attractions and of tours the highest and accommodation, dining and hire lower by about 10 percentage points. A logistic regression was done with dependent variable SM uptake (yes/no) to determine the factors associated with it. The analyses showed that industry sector was most associated with SM uptake, predicting 69%; urbanity (capital cities versus the rest) and employment size (less than 5, 5-199 200 and more employees) also had some slight association. Organization type (stand alone, franchise, etc.) had none.

Predominately Facebook was the only site presence for half the respondents who had adopted SM; about one fifth had presence on two sites and the rest (about 27%) three or more (Table 1). There were significant differences in the number of site presences by urbanity, industry sector, organization employment size - capital cities, tours and over 200 employee organization respectively being more likely to have a multi-site presence. There were no differences by type of organization.

Table 1 Number of sites used by tourism operator social media adopters

Nr sites	Accom	Dining	Attractions	Tours	Hire	Total
1 site	55%	59%	40.4%	28%	35%	50%
2 sites	21%	25%	19.7%	19%	28%	22%
3 and more sites	25%	17%	39.9%	52%	37%	28%

P<0.001

Only just over half of the organisations updated contents of Facebook at least once a week, tours-related operators being the most frequent updaters at about two thirds and accommodation operators the most infrequent at less than half updating once a week or more. The next biggest category was less than one per week - about a quarter, whilst 15% updated less than once per month (Table 2).

Table 2 Frequency of Facebook site contents update by tourism operators

	Accom	Dining	Attractions	Tours	Hire	Total
>1 per year or never	4%	3%	3%	2%	0.0%	3%
>1 per month	20%	12%	9%	9%	24%	15%
>1 per week	32%	21%	24%	21%	22%	26%
1 or more per week	44%	63%	63%	68%	54%	56%

P<0.001

A quite substantial proportion of organisations (about two thirds) monitored the number of consumers engaging with them through specific social media types (number of followers, subscribers, page likes, etc.) and also the level of consumer engagement with their social media contents (views, retweets, repins, shares, likes, number of comments, etc.).

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Whilst consumer trends indicate increased uptake of sites such as You Tube, Twitter and Instagram the poor level of adoption of SM sites other than Facebook is concerning. It appears that Australian tourism organisations are not providing adequate media platforms for their clients to engage with them and are therefore not responsive to consumer trends. Because of the difficulty of understanding the SM situation, costs and benefits of adoption, more research is needed that can inform Australian tourism operators' decisions in which platforms to invest. Maintenance of SM sites is of paramount importance in business management. For many operators, frequency of updating site contents needs to be improved so that visitors can access timely information. Further, SM marketing is based on real-time conversations and tourism operators have to acknowledge that if they want to be successful in this realm.

Finally Australian tourism organisations need to extend the capture and analyses of SM data in order to monitor consumer trends, and respond to the implications and generally manage performance of their business. For a significant proportion of Australian tourism operators it appears that SM adoption could be extended to more sites and also does not yet translate to using the applications well for managing their business.

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