Use of Social-Media on Travel Planning Process: An Overview

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Abstract:

The technological shift in all spheres of life has left us spellbound and amazed and has ushered in a whole generation of connected consumers who thrive on information and communication. Today social media has emerged as the new medium of communication across the generations. The growing appetite for involvement is a sign of a more open society that empowers its citizens to participate with technology as a catalyst for change. Social media represents a cost-effective, high-reach, just-in-time strategy and since West Bengal provides so many diverse and exotic attractions for tourists, it's ideal to promote via the rich mix of approaches possible through the digital way. Tourists generally move to destinations they think better for relaxation, break, and recreation and their choices of destinations depend upon the information they get from different social media. That is how, they choose destinations on the basis of what they have heard from diverse sources like peer groups, colleagues, etc, read or seen from social media such as Facebook, Twitter, Google+, YouTube, Trip Advisor, Blogging, LinkedIn, Flicker, and Pinterest. Social media can be instrumental in creating an image of the place even before the tourist arrives there, through various reviews, blogs, and opinion-based sites. This also ensures better reach on the part of the various tourist destinations. The researcher aims to find out the role of the social media in promoting tourism. And for this, apart from studying the secondary literature the researcher surveyed 300 respondents to understand the influence of social media for their vacation planning. Proper statistical interpretation also carried out to meet the objective.

Keyword- social media, tourism, travel decision, group interaction, uses and gratification, group formation.

1. Introduction:

Social media plays an especially important role in voicing any kind of change starting from nature and ending to politics. It is the easiest medium to reach a larger number of desired crowds at a very less amount of time. Sustainable tourism, as a matter of fact, is a very new and growing concept that has not been properly put into any concrete structure whatsoever. Many content creators and even common people, who understand the need for sustainable tourism, post contents, and write-ups promoting a place's natural beauty and its diversity. They tend to spread a message of preserving its true nature and promoting locals' facilities and stays to help with the improvement of the area and the people living there. Social media is still an open box of possibilities. Decades ago, the invention of social media was just another technological boom. But with the time it shows its enormous potentialities. Now more than

300 million people spend on social media platforms for more than 5 hours a day and exchange their thought, message, opinion, etc.

A study by the Internet and Mobile Association of India (IMAI) and Indian Market Research Bureau (IRMB)[1] International reported that 143 million people used social media across India. According to the report user of social media has grown up with 100% in a rural area with 25 million users as of April 2015. Major users of social media in India are college students (34%) and young people (27%). One of the major reasons for having the internet is social media. In India, Facebook is leading social media website with 96% followed by Google Plus (61%), Twitter (43%) and LinkedIn (21%) (Bhargava, 2015)[2].

Facebook is continuing to dominate the Indian landscape of social media. The company has 135 billion users globally with 864 daily active users. At the end of September 2014, India has 112 million Facebook users after the US. A study conducted by Facebook, *'Coming of Age on Screens'*, about 66% of young and adults use Facebook for update information around the globe (Facebook for Business)
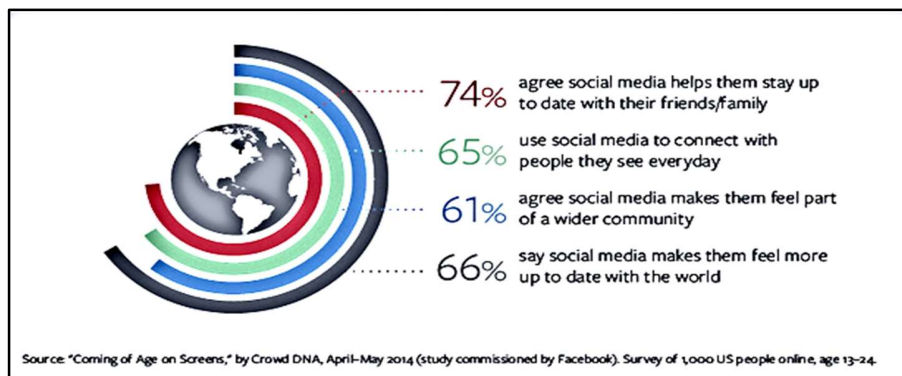

Figure No. 1: Reason to use social media
Source: (Coming of Age on Screens, April- May 2014)[3]

A study by TCS (Tata Consultancy Service) among 17478 students from 12 cities revealed that Facebook is the most favorite social networking site for 'Gen Y' of India. 83.38% registered on Facebook. 73.65% of the students access the internet for their school project, whereas 62.35% were busy in chat/blog/connect.

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[1]Singh, S. (2012). *Rural internet users to reach 45 million by December 2012.* Economic Times.
[2] Bhargava, Y. (2015, June 20). Use of social media doubles in rural India. *The Hindu*.
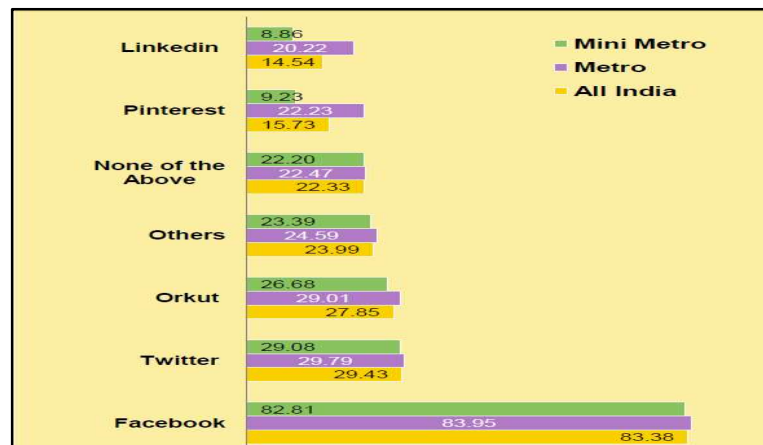[3](April- May 2014). *Coming of Age on Screens.* Crowd DNA.

Figure No. 2: Social Media Users

Source: TCS Gen Y survey 2012[4]

Having many characteristics like instantaneousness, abruptness, and spontaneous, the internet has become extremely popular among young generations as a tool of communication and opinion.

2. Review of Literature:

2.1 Social-Media and Interaction Theory of Group Formation:

There is no denying that social media change our way of experience around us. Travel is the most shared topic on social network giants like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. Interaction Theory of Group Formation by George Homans[5,] based on three elements- activities, interactions, and sentiments. According to Homan, these elements are directly related to each other. It explains the basic idea behind any group formation. Later Thibaut and Kelley[6] put forward the theory. Social Exchange Theory, by George Homans, explores the exchange of views and opinions between small groups or individuals. The theory states that humans are likely to engage in activities that are rewarding and avoids those which are high a cost. In social media, users are generally seen to exchange views only on the topic they get the direct reward. Social media sites have been recognized for long as people use this more for consuming information than generating. The tourism group also gives people a platform to exchange opinions among like-minded people.

[4] (2014). *TCS Gen Y Survey 2012.* Tata Consultancy Services. Retrieved August 2015, from
http://www.tcs.com/SiteCollectionDocuments/Gen-Y-2012-Presentation-0813.pdf
[5] Homans, G. C. (1961). *Social Behavior: Its Elementary Forms.* Harcourt: Brace.
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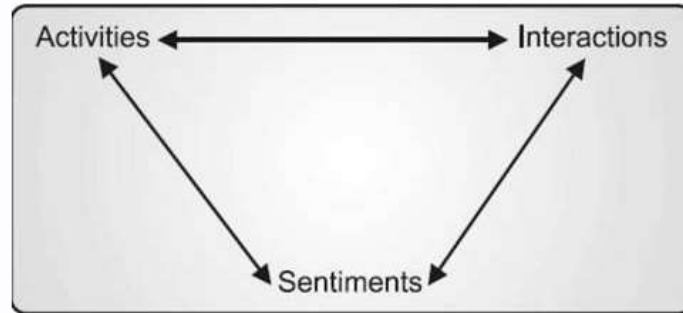
Figure No. 3: Interaction Theory of Group Formation
Source: George Homans et el.

2.2 Social-Media and Gratification of Needs:

The earlier notion that viewers were passive recipients of media messages was challenged by *uses and gratifications theory*, which proposed that people are goal-directed in their behavior, are active media users, and are aware of their needs, and select media to gratify those needs. People use media to relieve boredom or give focus and direction to their lives. The theory explains the process of media choice, specifically why and how individuals actively select specific types of media content to gratify their needs. People's dependency on media proves audience goals to be in the origin of the dependency while the uses and gratification approach focuses more on audience needs. The theory places more focus on the consumer, or audience, instead of the actual message itself by asking 'what people do with media' rather than 'what media does to people' (Katz, Jay, & Gurevitch, 2011)[7]. The approach suggests that people use the media to fulfill specific gratification. They look for a good destination, the gateway to refresh their mind and body. Based on the need, people join various tourism groups to get information.

2.3 Promoting Tourist Destinations through Social Media Groups:

Tourism is high information and knowledge-based industry. It required extensive use of transferring and sharing information. Social media have updated communication in the tourism industry. Worldwide social network groups played an important role in tourism promotion in the travel industry. Several studies have shown the potential of social media in the tourism industry (Leung, Law, Hoof, & Buhalis, 2013)[8]. It also converted the nature of travelers. Social media allow internet users to interact, to communicate, and to build a

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[7] Katz, E., Jay, B., & Gurevitch, M. (1973). Uses and Gratifications Research. *Public Opinion Quarterly, 37*(4), 509-523. doi:https://doi.org/10.1086/268109

[8]Leung, D., Law, R., Hoof, H., & Buhalis, D. (2013). Social Media in Tourism and Hospitality: A literature Review. *Journal of Travel & Tourism Marketing, 30*(1-2), 3-22.

relationship (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010)[9]. In another study, it was found that the knowledge of tourism heavily depends on experience and practices. Social networking, particularly social media like Facebook provides the opportunity for users to share their knowledge and experience about any tourist destinations (Nezakati, Amidi, Jusoh, Moghadas, Aziz, & Sohrabinezhadtalemi, 2015)[10]. Travel planning process highly inclined by electronic word of mouth from social media (Pan, MacLaurin, & Crotts, 2007)[11]. Knowledge sharing makes an individual allow to share her/his experiences, perceptions, or knowledge with other individuals. Thus, the recipient of the knowledge might use it to grow her/his performance. In other words, knowledge sharing is an exchange activity among individuals, groups, and communities to share not only their knowledge, experience, and skills, but also their interests (Wasko & Faraj, 2005)[12]. The travel planning process consists of three key stages. In the pre-trip stage, potential travelers recognize their need of travel; they search for travel related information and evaluate alternatives. During the trip, tourists also make specific decisions. Finally, within the post-trip stage, tourists evaluate their trips by experience sharing through WOM or social media [13]

4. Research Objectives:

After reviewing different kinds of literature, the objective of this paper can be mentioned as-How the concept of group formation has created connected users on promoting tourist destinations.

5. Research Methodology:

Along with reading and evaluating numerous works of literature, the researcher also performed a random sample of 300 people from Siliguri, a city with a focus on tourism, and Kolkata, a major metropolis. The researcher used chi square analysis to determine the development of social media groups as a strategy for promoting tourism destinations. Additionally, a survey of relevant literature on the subject has been found, examined, and commented. There have been quantitative and qualitative research techniques used. Surveys and questionnaires have been utilised, together with the correct statistical techniques.

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[9]Kaplan, A., & Haenlein, M. (2010). Users of the World, unite!The Challenges and Oppurtunities of Social Media. *Business Horizon, 53*(1), 59-68.

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6. Results:

6.1 Social-Media and its Network:

By using the concept shown below, social media enables widespread communication and eventually leads to the establishment of groups. The Kietzmann et al. model outlines the precise steps that social media takes to work in terms of presence, dialogue sharing, reputations, groups, and identity development, all of which contribute to the flow of decision-making [14].
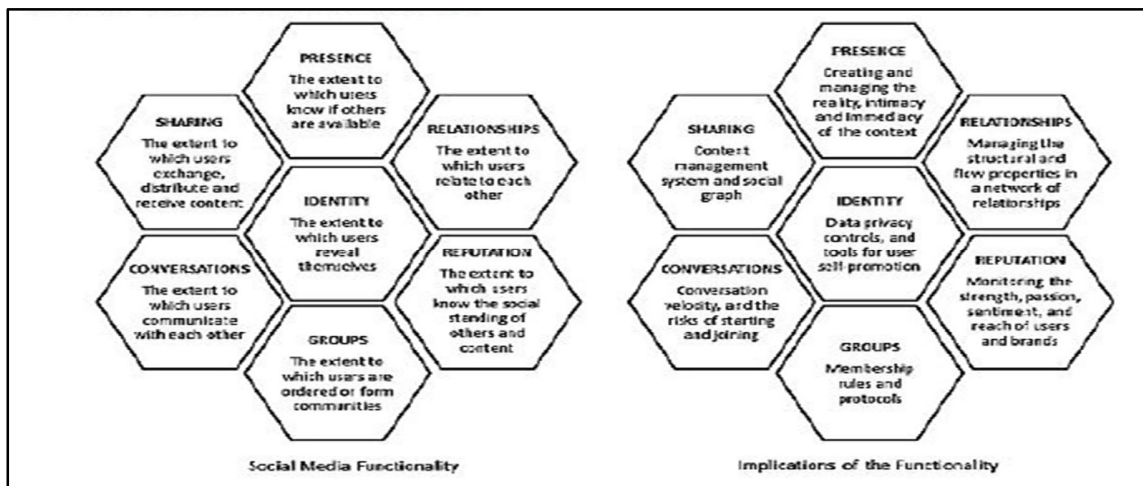

Figure No. 4 The honeycomb of social media[15]

A survey was undertaken to ascertain the study's goal, which was to determine how much time individuals spend on social networking sites and for what reasons. Additionally, it was done to determine the degree of dependence created by social media. Most of the respondents utilised social media and ranged in age from 20 to 45. The vast majority of respondents provided anonymous responses on their use of Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter as their main platforms for communication and for looking up travel destinations. Many people hardly ever used social media. And a lot of respondents visited two websites at once. Most respondents claimed they used it for between two and three hours a day, while the fewest said they used it for less than 30 minutes. When asked why they use social media, most respondents said it is for communication, with decision-making coming in second.

To understand the role of social media, researchers asked few questions.

Q1. How often do you consult social media sites for your needs?

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[14] Jana, M. (2018, October-December). From the Pen to the Mouse: Building public opinion on environmental issues through social media. *Mass Communicator, 12*(4), 19-26.

[15] Keitzmann, J. H., Hermkens, K., Mccarthy, P. I., & Silvestre, B. S. (2011). Social Media? Get serious! Understanding the functional building blocks of social media. *Business Horizons, 54*, 241-251.

Q2. How often do you believe these social networking sites?

Q3. How often do you consult social media websites for your vacation?

Q4. How often do you typically feel that these social media websites have helped in you in your decision on tourist places?

Q5. How often social media groups helped you in taking decision on various tourist places?

As a communication tool, social media has taken on a significant role. Social media is used by individuals all over the world to interact with other people and organizations. People have started using social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram[16]. Users discuss evaluations of destinations, details about homestays and hotels, ideas for using particular local cuisine, recommendations for local transportation and food, and much more. On social media, people have numerous "connections," and as a result, many people absorb information. Users and their decision-making processes are influenced by this information. Numerous people, according to research, use the information and opinions posted on social media as a resource when choosing their next travel destinations[17]. Tussyadiah and Fesemaier[18] claimed that the availability of choice sets and destination knowledge had grown as a result of social media. Reviews or accounts from travellers may improve general awareness about certain locations, which in turn influences travel or return intentions[19]. Further study also showed that potential passengers were more likely to modify their destination decision the greater the perceived amount of impact from social media on destination choice[20].

Table – 1 : Table of Observed Values						
Questions	Very Often	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never	Total
Q1	90	115	58	31	6	300
Q2	89	102	63	30	16	300
Q3	107	113	56	20	4	300
Q4	86	97	78	26	13	300
Q5	81	92	74	31	22	300
Total	453	519	329	138	61	1500

[16] Dinan, C., & Sargeant, A. (2000). Social marketing and sustainable tourism: is there a match? *International journal of tourism reserach, 2*(1), 2-14.

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[19] Kirilenko, A. P., Stepchenkova, S. O., & Hernandez, J. M. (2019). Comparative clustering of destination attractions for different origin markets with network and spatial analyses of online reviews. *Tourism Management, 72*, 400-410.

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Table - 2: Table of expected / calculated values						
Questions	Very Often	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never	Total
Q1	90.6	103.8	65.8	27.6	12.2	300
Q2	90.6	103.8	65.8	27.6	12.2	300
Q3	90.6	103.8	65.8	27.6	12.2	300
Q4	90.6	103.8	65.8	27.6	12.2	300
Q5	90.6	103.8	65.8	27.6	12.2	300
Total	453	519	329	138	61	1500

Table -3: Calculation of Chi- Square values

Degree of freedom	16
Significance level (p - Value)	0.05
Chi-square critical	26.29623

The predicted and observed value of using social media were determined using a chi-square analysis. The anticipated value of 300 random samples was calculated, and the value of the chi square at the 5% level of significance with 16 degrees of freedom was determined to be 26.29623. This result gives hope for the development of social media groups as a tool for decision-making. From the viewpoint of the traveler, social media has significantly altered how travelers choose [21].

7. Conclusion:

Social media are highly instantaneous, transcend location and time, are simple to use, and are inexpensive. Furthermore, it is a crucial communication tool because to the social network development that underlies it. According to the findings, social media significantly affects consumers' decisions about communication mediums. Decisions about tourism destinations are often influenced by reviews and comments. Social media functions as an online word of mouth. Therefore, users often seek advice from others' ideas and experiences while making plans. Not only that, but social media also assisted in promoting a tourism destination among its users via its networks.

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