

Social Media and Decision-Making Process among Tourist: A Systematic Review

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ABSTRACT

Social media nowadays have a huge influence on the tourism sector. With the advancement of search engines, tourists can search for any information they need on their tourism preferences. Today, there are tons of social media websites (such as TripAdvisor, Trivago, Booking.com, Agoda.com) that can help the tourist to find and decide the best tourism places and activities around the world. Studies have shown that social media is one of the best tools that are used by a tourist in the decision-making process. This paper is written to have a better understanding and to find a gap in the studies related to this topic. Hence, this paper focuses on conceptual review using a systematic review based on 24 published journals and theses from 2015 to 2019 on the influence of social media and its impact on the decision-making process for the tourist. Based on the findings, the majority of the scholars supported that social media have a big impact on how people make the decision for their tourism destination. The gaps that derived from this review have proven that only limited studies have been conducted in Malaysia; most of the research used a quantitative approach; only a few studies have included the theory related to this issue, and the targeted respondents were mostly among young travellers. Therefore, further studies on the role of social media in the decision-making process can be done by focusing on these gaps, especially in the Malaysian context.

Keywords: *Decision-making, influence, social media, tourism, tourist.*

INTRODUCTION

Tourism is a social, cultural and economic phenomenon that entails the movement of people to countries or places outside their usual environment for personal or business/professional purposes. These people are called visitors (which may be either tourists or excursionists; residents or non-residents) and tourism has to do with their activities, some of which involve tourism expenditure (UNWTO, 2020). Tourism can also create memorable experiences for the tourists and some of the main purposes of travelling would be for leisure, exploration, relaxation, visitation and also religious purposes (Dusíková, 2018). Nowadays, tourism is mostly connected with the internet where tourists can always search for any information needed on the web and most of the platforms used by the tourist would be social media.

Social media is commonly known as a platform in a form of electronic communication that enables users to create, share or even exchange information, ideas, experience, images and videos (Ackland & Kyosuke, 2015; Benea, 2014). It is also known as a tool for users to rely on for deciding on anything, make it in the retailing, health, education and even tourism industry. This happens because social media plays a major role in influencing the decision making for the users since a lot of information as well as experiences are shared virtually on the web nowadays (Benea, 2014, Veríssimo & Menezes, 2016). In the tourism context, social media prepare platforms for tourists to find

information and also share their knowledge and experience with other tourists. Reviews that are prepared by the tourists can be used as a tool or mechanism in helping other tourists decide on certain destinations or activities (Dusíková, 2018). Most of the tools of social media that are used by tourists are Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, TripAdvisor, Trivago, Booking.com and a lot more. These tools can influence the tourist decision making on their tourism preference and activities and this will be discussed below.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Social media as a tool in tourism marketing

Social media is known as a computer-based technology or also known as an internet-based application and mobile technologies that emerged from the technological foundation of Web 2.0 (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Benea, 2014) which is a business revolution in the computer industry with using the internet as a platform (O'Reilly, 2005). Social media turns communication into an interactive type of dialogue that allows the sharing of ideas and information through the virtual networks and it can be in a variety of forms like internet forums, blogs, podcasts, photographs and videos (Benea, 2014). From a marketer point of view, social media is a platform that allows marketers and the online communities to create meaningful conversations and content and it is free (Levinson & Gibson, 2010; Benea, 2014). With the social media revolution, it is obvious that social media are used as a communication tool that allows anybody to communicate with everybody (Sterne, 2010; Baruah, 2012; Benea, 2014).

Social media is widely used for marketing in various sectors namely tourism, hotelier, business and retailing. Some of the examples of the social media that these businesses use other than their websites were Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Pinterest, Flickr, YouTube and TripAdvisor (Sterne, 2010; Benea, 2014). Due to the increasing popularity of social media, many tourism providers such as hotels, travel agencies, and airline companies have been using this platform as one of their crucial marketing and communication tools (Sahin & Sengün, 2015). According to Benea (2014) studies, all hotels in her studies have their own website and also multiple websites for their property including a Facebook page as the brand embraces a sub-brand were famous in Vienna. Benea (2014) studies also shows that most of the hotels in Viennese use social media to measure engagement levels of followers, rating, and reviews from customers and not measuring revenues and costs of the business. What the hoteliers want from the social media platform was to create awareness to the customers of their brand and product and also identify the customers' wants and needs. It is important to have an online presence not just to reach the customers but also to get to know the customers and personalize the provided service.

Nor'izah et al. (2018) also admit that social media play an important role in shaping the reputation and organization's image where all the information on the organizations shared and how they share it can influence the public perception on the organization. This was shown in their studies on the management of the airline companies in Malaysia. It is concluded that the airline companies in Malaysia need to manage their social media properly in answering the queries and comments from customer to avoid the unwanted crisis. Social media also have a significant influence on developing brand image where the social media word-of-mouth was found to be crucial in enhancing a company brand image. Other than that, the contents and reviews in the company's social media platform seem to give a huge impact on the consumer's perception of the brand image. Companies should know that social media advertising and promotions using social media platforms like

Facebook and YouTube are one of the most important marketing efforts that can enhance the brand image. Consumers positive feedbacks through their reviews and comments can also help in enhancing the organization's brand image. (Raji et al., 2018).

In the tourism context, social media is also used as a tool that can strengthen the relationship with the tourists where tourism provider use this platform to create a bond of trust with the tourists and understating the impacts of the tourist services intangibility (Gentile et al., 2007; Veríssimo & Menezes, 2016). Social media also helps to promote marketing experience where the tourism provider can establish emotional links between the brand or service with the tourists. This can also build a destination over people where the attributes of the destination get quality, competitive edge, innovation, cooperation and collaboration (Gretzel et al., 2000; Veríssimo & Menezes, 2016). According to Veríssimo and Menezes (2016), social media plays a vital role in creating a good environment to enhance tourists' experience in hotel services and social media are also important for hotels' marketing managers in helping them to increase the quality of the services. In this context, there were two components of customer experience that were pointed out by social media which were lifestyle and relational. These two components include how social media plays an important role in consolidating the hotels' brand image by providing services to align with the customer's lifestyle together with their values and beliefs and also how the hotels connect with the customers through their services. There are four aspects that social media can help in enhancing the tourist's experience which is helping in marketing research, associating the brand image of the hotel, connection with the tourists and also creating a community of Fans to the hotels. (Gentile et al., 2007; Veríssimo & Menezes, 2016). Social media also plays a significant role in medical tourism where trust is a crucial feature when it comes to the quality of the information. In the medical tourism context, the quality and information evaluation provided in the websites of the medical institutions are vital in persuading and influencing the tourist patient's decision-making process (Mohammad Ali et al., 2016).

Some tourism provider like the Tourism Australia encouraged the tourism industry in the region to embrace social media to promote their business and this tourism provider also offers their help by offering operators access to their global network Facebook fans and using this platform automatically gives all the tourism provider incredible free marketing (Tourism Australia, 2012; Zeng, 2013). If a tourism destination cannot connect with the virtual communities through social media, it can lose connection with millions of people who are connected with the virtual world. Around the world, millions of potential tourists are making researches for their potential tourism destination through the internet and social media by comparing the websites of other destinations based on the service and product experience provided by the destinations. Tourism provider invests a lot on their websites to increase their opportunities to attract tourists (Park & Gretzel, 2007; Sahin & Sengün, 2015). That just shows how crucial social media are in promoting and enhancing the tourism industry. It has been proven that social media is a vital tool for tourism marketing and social media also plays a huge influence on tourist decision making. This will be discussed more in the next section.

Social Media Influence on Tourist Decision Making

Social media plays a major role in tourism decision making and these have been proven by numerous studies. Tourists nowadays search for every information on tourism destinations or activities like information, explanation, reviews, ratings, images and so on. This process is called as the information-collecting stage that usually takes place before any decision has been made by the tourists (Loncaric, 2013; Hamid et al., 2016).

Other than information and reviews, communications between the tourism provider with the potential tourist are also crucial where good quality communication through the tourism website will give an influence on the tourist decision making (Litvin et al., 2008; Abd Hamid et al., 2016). Communications in social media are also vital to determine tourist feedback, giving them clear information to make them understand the services given and also providing a knowledge satisfaction to the tourist (O'Connor, 2001; Hamid et al., 2016).

The social media platforms consist of travel-specific online communities, travel blogs, social networking sites which allows the tourist to communicate with other tourists, sharing their experience, comments, and opinions. Social media are considered as reliable and trustworthy as they can help the tourist to avoid uncertainty and increase their expectation on tourism destinations or activities (Xiang & Gretzel, 2010; Dusíková, 2018).

Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) have classified social media into six types according to their level of social presence and self-disclosure and representation. These six classifications are social networking websites like Facebook, LinkedIn; blogs, content communities like YouTube, Flickr; collaborative projects like Wikipedia, Wikitravel; virtual social worlds like Second Life; and virtual game worlds like World of Warcraft (Dusíková, 2018).

Social media is a very vital tool in the tourist decision making because tourist that use social media as their preference gets to know about the tourism destination and explore it through virtual spaces, gets to evaluate and narrow their selection of choices, avoid activities and destinations that are not recommended by other tourists, create images of the destinations, gives ideas and provide experience to others, reduce uncertainty and risk, helping in assisting tourism planning and also increase the confidence levels in tourists (di Pietro et al., 2012; Dusíková, 2018).

According to Sahin & Sengün (2015), the young generations are mostly affected by reviews and comments in social media and most of them also contribute to sharing their tourism experience with media tools like photos and videos. Social media has a positive and also negative effect on the tourism industry and this is because the comments and reviews in social media can largely influence the tourist decision making towards their tourism preferences (Buhalis & Rossides, 2012; Sahin & Sengün, 2015; Dusíková, 2018). Through Sahin & Sengün (2015) studies on the impact of social media, all the positive and negative reviews found in social media can play a huge influence on the tourist's decision. 41.1% of all respondents agreed that they have been influenced by positive comments on social media about holiday destinations and 47.8% of all respondents agreed that they have been influenced by negative comments on social media about holiday destinations (Sahin & Sengün, 2015).

A post on social media can become a poll, collating tips and opinions. Together with Sahin and Sengün (2015), according to a survey done by Expedia (2020), Gen Z and millennials are mostly affected by the input on social media where a national study shows that 27% of Millennials have posted a potential tourism destination on social media to get opinions and comments before they start booking. Other than that, the same study also

shows that 36% of gen Z have decided on a tourism destination based on a social media posting they saw on the specific destination.

From the studies that have been conducted on the influence of social media, we can see that social media does play a big role and influence on tourist decision making. A lot of studies have been conducted in numerous countries but how about Malaysia? What are tools used to conduct a study on social media impact especially in the tourism context? Most importantly, what is the significance of these studies? Therefore, this review is very important to have a better understanding and to find a gap in the studies related to this topic.

METHODOLOGY

This is a conceptual paper using a systematic review. According to Gabrielsson (2017), there are four main steps in the systematic review process which are: 1) planning the review objective, 2) search through electronic, 3) analysis and review the coding and 4) reporting the findings. Therefore, this systematic review was based on 24 full-length open access journal articles and open access theses and dissertations from the website (working paper, BlogSpot, report, book chapters, conference proceedings, etc. excluded from this review). The researcher reviewed the literature from the period 2015 –2019. The findings from this paper are based on secondary sources of data. To identify relevant studies, the database searches using the keywords: "social media and tourism decision", "social media and travel decision making", "social media and destination decision making", "social media and trip decision making", "social media and holiday decision making", and "social media and decision making for a trip" using the Google scholar, Emerald full text, and Science Direct and Web of Science databases. Furthermore, this paper limits the search of the journal that contained "decision making" or "decision" or "destination choice" in tourism and "social media or social networking" from their titles and keywords. Other journal articles were excluded from this review.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This section outlines the review of the study related to the role of social media in tourism decision making. A summary of the reviews of 24 published articles from 2015 to 2019 is given in Table 1.

Based on the internet search, there was about 24 open access published journal and theses were found. In detail, 4 journals from 2015, 2 journals from 2016, 7 journals from 2017, 5 journals from 2018, and 6 journals from 2019. These studies have been done in several countries such as the United Kingdom, Finland, Austria, Australia, Sri Lanka, Russia, Turkey, Indonesia, India, Malaysia, and Albanian. As mentioned before, only a few studies have been conducted in Malaysia (Hua, Ramayah, Ping & un-Hwa, 2017; Kamarul & Nawar, 2017; Hamid et al., 2016; Bay, 2018). This is questionable because Malaysia is known for the tourism industry and Kuala Lumpur is ranked in the top ten of the most visited cities in the world (Traveller, 2018; CNNtravel, 2018 & Cntraveler, 2019). Other than that, Malaysia was also ranked as one of the top five globally and highest in Southeast Asia for mobile social media penetration (NST, 2018).

In terms of research methodology, the majority of the study used a quantitative approach, followed by a qualitative approach, review paper, and mixed approach (quantitative and qualitative). Furthermore, most of the researchers have done data

collection through an online survey. This method was significantly relevant since the targeted respondents are the people who use the Internet and social media. Meanwhile, the qualitative approach was done through interviews and focus group discussions.

One of the most important findings related to the review is the targeted respondents of the research. Several scholars from this review (e.g. Sugala & Rizwan, 2019; Marcello, Maria, & Julian, 2019; Angelika, 2015; Parsons, 2017; Ana & Istudor, 2019; Daisy, 2017; Terttunen, 2017) have focused on young travellers or Millennials Generation (known as Generation Y); those individuals between the ages of 18 and 35 years. This cohort is the largest generation of Internet and social media users. Therefore, their impact and influence on social media in tourism sectors were huge and significant. Moreover, the most common and popular social media sites used for tourism sectors which been highlighted in many journals are Facebook, Instagram, Trip Advisor, Booking.com, YouTube, Twitter, Pinterest, Snapchat, Word Press, Four Square, LinkedIn, and Virtualtourist.com.

Briefly, based on 24 journals, there are few studies have applied some theory and model in their research. For instance, a study conducted by Parsons (2017) has discussed the theory of tourist decision-making behaviour by Engle, Blackwell and Miniard (1990). This theory is one of the popular theories and widely used on social media influence on travel decision-making which focuses on three phases decision-making namely pre-trip, during-trip and post-trip. While Min-En Aaron (2016) explained on Tourists' Cognitive Decision Making (TCDM) Model proposed by Chen (1998). This theory aimed at understanding the role of agents of influence towards choice outcomes which focus on some key elements such as travel intention, problem formulation, information search, latent influence from mediating variables, evaluation and implementation (Chen, 1998). Even though this model has been tested in various contexts, however, there are certain limitations of this model such as may not apply to all types of destination decisions (Min-En Aaron, 2016). Furthermore, a study by Dwityas and Briandana (2017) adapted a Travel Decision Making Model (Mathieson & Wall, 1982) and Activities of Information Use in Social Media (McCann, 2008) in their study. This model interprets the use of social media in the decision making of tourism based on three phases: before, when and after the travel.

In short, another main finding of this study is related to the role of social media in the decision-making process in tourism. It is shown that the majority of scholars agreed that social media is a powerful tool that significantly has a positive impact on the decision-making process in tourism. Based on the review, it can be concluded that social media sites play a vital role in helping tourists to make the decision. Valuable information found in social media such as images, videos, reviews, feedback, rating, promotion, and popularity is very helpful in assisting tourist to make the decision before they travel. In fact, some tourists argued that all this information is more relevant than information provided by tourism websites and tourism providers. The photos were taken and shared by real travellers also very useful and important to increase the desire to travel than photos uploaded by service providers. Besides, it is unsurprising to find that a piece of combination information from social media and travel experiences shared by family members and friends have inspired others to make travel choices. Social media has brought an evolution impact in the tourism sector.

Table 1. Summary of article journals from 2015-2019

No.	Author	Year	Source of Journal	Title of Journal	Study location	Research Method	IV	DV
1.	Angelika Beham	2015	Thesis (Vienna University)	Role of Social Media in Generation Y travellers' travel decision making process	Austria	Qualitative	social media	travel decision making process
2.	Anna Terttunen	2017	Thesis (University of Applied Sciences, Haa-ga Helia)	The influence of Instagram on consumers' travel planning and destination choice	Finland	Quantitative	social media (specifically Instagram)	travel planning and destination choice
3.	Bay Sheue Wen	2018	Thesis (Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman)	The Effects of Social Media on Consumer Behaviour in Tourism: A Study Among University Students.	Malaysia	Quantitative	social media	consumer behaviour in tourism
4.	Daisy Magill	2017	Thesis (Cardiff Metropolitan University)	The influence of social media on the overseas travel choices of Generation Y.	UK	Quantitative and Qualitative	social media	holiday decision process
5.	Dean Creevey, Etain Kidney and Glenn Mehta	2019	Journal of Travel & Tourism Marketing	From dreaming to believing: a review of consumer engagement behaviours with brands' social media content across the holiday travel process	-	Review	social media user engagement behaviors	travel process
6.	Hannah Louise Parsons	2017	Thesis (Cardiff Metropolitan University)	Does Social Media Influence an Individual's Decision to Visit Tourist Destinations? Using A Case Study of Instagram	UK	Quantitative and Qualitative	social media	individual's decision to visit a tourist destination
7.	Hossein Nezakati, Asra Amidi, Yusmadi Yah Jusoh, Shayesteh Moghadas, Yuhanis Abdul Aziz, Roghayeh Sohrabinezhadtalemi	2015	ScienceDirect Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences	Review of Social Media Potential on Knowledge Sharing and Collaboration in Tourism Industry	-	Systematic Review	-	knowledge sharing in social media in tourism sector

No.	Author	Year	Source of Journal	Title of Journal	Study location	Research Method	IV	DV
8.	Irma Shyl, Vjollca Hysi (Panajoti)	2015	European Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies	Social Media and its Impact on Decision Making for Trip	Albanian	Quantitative	Social Media	decision making for trip
9.	Juho Pesonena Katja Pasanen	2017	Information and Communication Technologies in Tourism	A closer look at tourist information search behavior when travelling abroad: what is the role of online marketing in choice of destination?	Finland	Qualitative	role of online marketing	destination choice
10.	Kamarul Faizal Hashima, Nawar Abbood Fadhil	2017	ScienceDirect Procedia Computer Science	Engaging with Customer Using Social Media Platform: A Case Study of Malaysia Hotels	Malaysia	Qualitative	level of engagement	social media platform
11.	Lim Yan Hua, T. Ramayah, Teoh Ai Ping & Cheah Jun-Hwa (Jacky)	2017	Business and Economics Journal	Social Media as a Tool to Help Select Tourism Destinations: The Case of Malaysia	Malaysia	Quantitative	social media	tourism destinations
12.	Marcello Mariani, Maria Ek Styven, Julian K. Ayeh	2019	International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management	Using Facebook for travel decision-making: an international study of antecedents	-	Quantitative	social media (specifically Facebook)	travel decision-making
13.	Maria-Irina Ana, Laura-Gabriela Istudor	2019	Management Dynamics in the Knowledge Economy	The Role of Social Media and User-Generated-Content in Millennials' Travel Behavior	-	Quantitative	Social Media and User-Generated Content	Millennial consumers' travel behavior
14.	Min-En Aaron Tham	2016	Thesis (Monash University)	The Influence of Social Media in Destination Choice	Melbourne	Qualitative	social media	destination choice
15.	Nikita Singhal, Varsha Khattri	2018	International Journal of Management, IT & Engineering	Impact of Social Media on Consumer Attitude and Purchase Decision in Travel and Tourism Industry	India	Quantitative	social media	- consumers behavior - purchase decision in Indian travel and tourism industry

No.	Author	Year	Source of Journal	Title of Journal	Study location	Research Method	IV	DV
16.	Nindyta Aisyah Dwitya, Rizki Briandana	2017	International Journal of Humanities and Social Science	Social Media in Travel Decision Making Process	Indonesia	Qualitative	social media	travel decision-making process
17.	Orhan Icoz, Anil Kutuk, Onur Icoz	2018	Revista de Turismo y Patrimonio Cultural	Social media and consumer buying decisions in tourism: The case of Turkey	Turkey	Quantitative	social media	consumer's decision-making process in tourism decisions of tourism consumers
18.	Ravindran, M. Nagamalar, P. Uma Rani	2018	Eurasian Journal of Analytical Chemistry	Social Media Sources (SMS) Influence on Tourism Choice Decisions	Madurai, Tamilnadu	Quantitative	social media sources	consumer's decision-making process in tourism decisions of tourism consumers
19.	Rosemary Matikiti-Manyevere, Martinette Kruger	2019	African Journal of Hospitality, Tourism and Leisure	The role of social media sites in trip planning and destination decision-making processes	-	Review	social media sites	trip decision making
20.	Sergey P. Kazakov, Marina D. Predvoditeleva	2015	Thesis (National Research University Higher School of Economics)	How Travelers Use Online and Social Media Channels to Make Hotel Choice Decisions. A Comparative Study of Russian Federation and American Tourists' Online Consumer Behavior	Russia	Quantitative	social media	hotel choice decisions
21.	Sneha Naidu	2019	International Journal of Management, Technology and Engineering	A Study on the Influence of Social Media on Tourist Psychology	Bengaluru	Quantitative	social media	psychology of potential tourist's decision to make travel choices

No.	Author	Year	Source of Journal	Title of Journal	Study location	Research Method	IV	DV
22.	Sugala Senanayake, Rizwan Anise	2019	Colombo Journal of Advanced Research	The Influence of Social Media on Millennial's Travel Decision Making Process	Sri Lanka	Quantitative	Social Media	Travel Decision making Process
23.	Tereza Dusíková	2018	Thesis (State University of New York)	The Impact of Social Media on the Decision-making Process in Travel Planning	-	-	social media	travelers' decisions
24.	Hamid, Wee, Hanafiah & Asri	2016	Heritage, Culture and Society, In Radzi et al. (Eds) 2016 Taylor & Francis Group,	The effect of social media on tourists' decision to travel to Islamic destination: A case of Malaysia	Malaysia	Quantitative	attributes of social media	decision to travel

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, based on the articles reviewed from 2015 to 2019, it can be summarized that there are many studies that have examined the influence of social media on the decision-making process in tourism. Findings also have shown that social media is a crucial tool for tourist and tourism marketing. However, in the meantime, only limited studies have been focused on this topic in Malaysia. Therefore, there has been an increased recognition that more attention needs to be paid to this area. Several studies in tourism also suggested that there is a need to enhance the role of social media to boost the promotion of tourism sectors and to help the traveller to decide their holiday destination. The research gaps found in this paper also useful for future researchers to investigate and to conduct a better study. In addition, future studies may need to investigate the positive and negative impact of social media on tourist decision-making and make improvements on it and to make full use of this platform. It can be concluded that this paper is very crucial to provide a better understanding and to highlight the significant influence of social media on tourist decision-making. This review is hoped to be able to contribute to the body of knowledge and act as a guideline for future researchers in related fields.

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