Chapter 4

Electronic Word-of-Mouth: An Industry Tailored Application for Tourism Promotion

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ABSTRACT

From technology focused conceptual perspectives, the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT) as a theory of technology acceptance postulates four identified constructs as: performance expectancy, effort expectancy, social influence and facilitating conditions (Venkatesh, Morris, Davis, & Davis, 2003). This study concentrates on digital storytelling as a form of eWOM for tourism promotion within the UTAUT capacities in selected ‘developing’ tourism market perspectives. Results outline that in almost every aspects and contexts, appropriate technology application is supportive for tourism promotion where institutionalisation of market structures is relatively weaker.

INTRODUCTION

Electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) is mostly viewed as a type of buzz marketing that goes viral by nature. Internet acts as the core platform for eWOM where person based contacts remain as facilitator. Word-of-mouth is gradually taking specific shapes within both its traditional and electronic format that result in the concept of electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM). This is a relatively useful form of marketing. Also, this has been encompassing attentions and concerns over the last few decades as far as access and availability of electronic interfaces are concerned. In a simple meaning, based on person to person connections, electronic word-of-mouth as a process involves information sharing that can take place in any time and any circumstances depending on access to electronic platforms. Electronic word-of-mouth can render importance to business enterprises as each individual customer can be involved in different ways to help a business, both intentionally and unintentionally. From communication perspective, this is a form of advertising that plausibly acts as a part of reputation sharing of a business through recommendations by existing consumers. This is very unlikely that such recommendations can always be positive and bring effective results for a particular business or any personal gain of an identified customer is involved with
such recommendation. This functions not only as experience partaking within like minded peoples but also helps to turn them as potential consumers for the identified business. In order to share specific product or services experiences, storytelling can appear as one of the most typical form of eWOM. Storytelling on electronic platforms and forums can become powerful and influential if adopted and delivered with appeals known as digital storytelling. This is way that passes on a particular message in a more meaningful, impressive and entertaining way. Storytelling is featured as audience attention grabbing when, the message or contents are solid, reliable and transmitted professionally. From theoretical understanding as relevant to both electronic word-of-mouth and storytelling, the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT) as offered by Venkatesh, Morris, Davis, & Davis (2003), becomes a familiar model of technology acceptance. Basic constructs of this theory are: performance expectancy, effort expectancy, social influence and facilitating conditions. Following this theory, the first three constructs are direct determinants for use intention and behaviour whereas, the last is the direct determinant of use behaviour. This theory suggests that performance expectancy, effort expectancy and social influence foretell behavioral intention that leads towards the acceptance of information technology. Also, the theory proposes that facilitating conditions and behavioural intention predicts use behaviour for information technology acceptance. Soon after its inception, this theory has been playing crucial role in assessing applications use and is viewed as the dé factor model for measuring user acceptance (Taiwo & Downe, 2013). As electronic word-of-mouth and digital storytelling visibly relates to each other, this study offers insights from selected tourism markets in relation to the UTAUT. The identified tourism markets are generally tagged as ‘developing’ in terms of technology acceptance. The study critically analyzes all of three notions as: electronic word-of-mouth, digital storytelling and Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT) symmetrically, as concerned with tourism promotion.

Word-of-Mouth and Electronic Word-of-Mouth: The Background

According to Silverman (2011), word-of-mouth and psychology has very close interaction that was revealed with momentous contributions of his own. This psychologist as viewed as a pioneer in researching word-of-mouth developed the notion, ‘teleconferenced peer influence groups’. This group was created with an aim to involve physicians for discussing pharmaceutical products that were identified as new. Silverman observed a fascinating fact while he was in the process of performing focus groups with selected physicians during the early 70s. From this discussion, this was summarized that physicians with positive experiences on a selected drug tend to influence the cynicism of an entire group. Even, they might also affect those ex-prescribers with negative experiences. This was possible mainly by positive experience that they managed to generate. In fact, emergence of Web 2.0 has radicalized the entire online system where, existing websites started using buzz marketing through integrating social networks that they have created. Examples include YouTube, Facebook, Digg, MySpace and many more (Forbes, 2014). As internet was established as the solid base of communication, use of word-of-mouth appeared as more static, strong and constructive for both marketers and consumers. These in turn accelerated the shift towards electronic word-of-mouth.

Electronic word-of-mouth marketing has been in constructive use for several decades supported by technological development. This certainly supports the general understanding that, typical electronic word-of-mouth is gradually taking place of word-of-mouth through electronic formats as internet supported facilities. Electronic platforms and gadgets are becoming more supported and improved to appear as proven grounds to alter word-of-mouth. Electronic word-of-mouth in recent time becomes more mobile
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