

Social Media as a Sustainable Tool for Tourism Marketing Communication

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Abstract

Since the evolution of human being communication has played an important role in trade and business. Advancement in methods and medium of communication has given wings to marketing of goods and services in tourism as it is an information intensive industry. We have experienced diverse employability of Internet Communication Technologies (ICT's) which has given rise to Social Media as an important tool of marketing communication. This conceptual paper argues over the nature of sustainability of Social Media platforms and its constituent elements. Tourists are actively participating in creating marketing content on social media platforms along with destination marketers and promoters. User Generated Content (UGC) on social media platforms have become important source to help tourists in making a purchase decision for online and offline tourism products. Social Media allows user to upload, share, interact and make collection of user controlled data which serves as a guide for interested tourists. It is a platform where both tourism destination marketer and tourists become an information generator, disseminator and user. The paper applies the concept of sustainability on social media as a marketing communication tool and brings out the insights of social media to be called as a sustainable tool. The available literature indicates that dimensions of sustainability (environmental, economic, and social) are applicable on social media platforms in terms of generating online content which is less expensive, environment friendly and self-sustaining.

Keywords: Social media, Tourism Marketing, Sustainability, Sustainable tool, Tourism communication, Web 2.0.

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INTRODUCTION

It is observed that social media is used as a communication tool in areas of healthcare, Advertising campaign, promotion mix, Consumer engagement, Political campaigning, New Product Development, Branding tools for Hoteliers, and Educational Tool (Kumar, Kumar, & Mishra, 2015). Sustainability has emerged as a tool to access the potential of the global market (Nkamnebe, 2011), in the marketing mix for the goods and services (Jones *et al.*, 2008), and as a communication tool for the healthcare community (Gupta, & Sharma, 2013). Its role in tourism is also evident as Destination Marketing Organisations (DMOs) use it for marketing and promotion of destinations and related services (Kumar, 2018).

The usability of Internet Communication Technologies (ICT's), Web 2.0, and online digital platforms have strengthened the concept that tourism is an information-intensive industry (Kumar, Mishra, &

Rao, 2021; Werthner & Klein, 1999). These are also the constituent elements of social media that facilitate tourists and DMOs in destination marketing (Molinillo *et al.*, 2018) by sharing memorable experiences (Wong *et al.*, 2020). Shared experiences of tourists and DMOs are present on the media in a digital form offering big data (McCreary *et al.*, 2020) for being referred by tourists in the future. The ongoing addition of information and experiences on social media gives rise to the idea that social media can be called a "sustainable tool". To justify social media as a "sustainable tool" for tourism marketing a discussion on the concept of sustainability and Triple Bottom Line (TBL) is helpful.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Concept of Sustainability

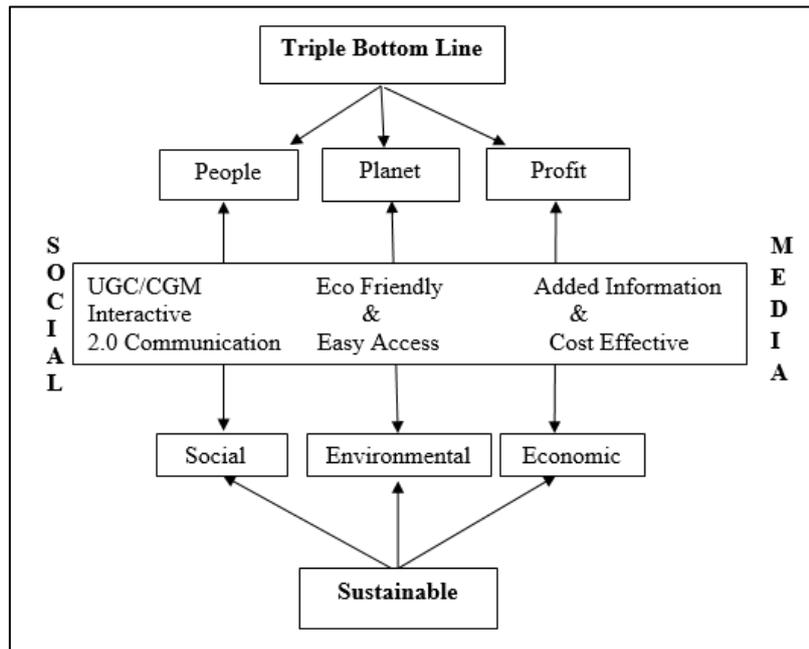
The concept of sustainability focuses upon three dimensions: environmental, economic, and social. Sustainable development was defined by the UN Environment Commission, chaired by Gro Harlem

Brundtland, in 1987 as: “Development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs”. Since then it has become a course of action in the businesses. Sustainable tourism practice is such a domain that focuses on environmental, economic, and social aspects of tourism activities. Thus, the concept of sustainability can be found in ideas or practices which support the tradeoff between present need and future requirements (Kumar, Kumar, & Mishra, 2015).

The concept of sustainable practices is already evident in tourism. When we critically examine the

features of social media we find that Web 2.0 platforms allow interaction of tourists leading to User Generated Content (UGC) and Consumer Generated Media (CGM). Firm-generated content can also be part of the UGC of social media. It allows the creation of a virtual tourism society or travel network where users and firms interact in online offline mode. Their shared experiences become the source of motivation and information for other tourists.

Figure: Model relating Triple Bottom Line, Sustainability and Social Media



Source: Kumar, Kumar, & Mishra, (2015)

The environmental aspect of sustainability can be ascertained by social media’s use of digital content rather than traditional communication using print media which is not environment friendly. Social media’s digital content reaches to a larger audience at a faster speed at least environmental cost. The use of digital documents, orders, passes, and tickets are able to save an ample amount of natural products in the tourism business.

Having used digital content for communication saves the environment and hence the cost involved with it. Social media establishments require a one-time investment that can be used for a longer duration. Several social media platforms offer free account creation and paid online advertisements targeting a large number of audiences. Tourism marketers use online social networks such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube for destination promotion (Kumar, 2018) along with traditional media.

Concept of Triple Bottom Line

To use the term sustainable we focus upon three pillars social, environmental, and economic. For being truly sustainable the idea can be compared with People, Planet, and Profit as aspects of the Triple Bottom Line (TBL) concept coined by Elkington (1998). These three aspects work together to be called sustainable.

The sustainable model of social media depicts that the pillars of sustainability support the three aspects of TBL. The idea of social-people, environment-planet, and economic-profit move together to be called sustainable. The creation of online networks, the formation of virtual communities, and interaction among them support the first pillar ‘people’ of TBL. Eco-friendly nature and ease of access can also be found associated with social media usage. Finally, markers also witness the regular addition of information and experiences by tourists on their social media pages which come at no cost. Thus, social media helps in

increasing profits by spending less on print media for tourism marketing communication.

CONCLUSION

With help of discussed features of TBL, sustainability, and social media it is proposed that social media can be called a “sustainable tool”. Such nature of social media attracts destination marketers for tourism marketing communication since it allows tourists to create, store, and access new and old information at any time at negligible cost and less harm to the environment. Hence, social media can be used as a “sustainable tool” for tourism marketing communication.

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