MANAGEMENT AND MARKETING

IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING ON CONSUMER BEHAVIOR IN THE GEORGIAN TOURISM INDUSTRY

D.Sc., Professor Nugzar Todua

Georgia, Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University

ARTICLE INFO
Received 14 April 2018
Accepted 29 April 2018
Published 12 May 2018

KEYWORDS
social media marketing, consumer behavior, Georgian tourism, marketing research

© 2018 The Authors.

ABSTRACT
The paper studies the role of social media marketing in consumer behavior on Georgian tourism market. The main attention is paid to the fact that social media marketing engages the consumer and determine the different tools of social media in tourism development. The current study evaluates the impact of social media marketing of tourist company on consumer buying decision. To determine the attitude of Georgian consumers to social media, conducted a marketing research. The study revealed the strong relationship between Activity of tourist company regarding to social media marketing and consumers behavior, as well as among Interest, reliability and satisfaction about social media marketing of tourist company and consumer buying decision.

Introduction. Social media increase marketing destinations in tourism industry. Analysis of literary sources show, that tourist customers generally trust online information and before planning a trip they visit forums and online reviews, as well as specialized blogs (Evangelos, 2012). The majority of the respondents considers, that they rely on social networking sites to discover and learn about new travel destinations and to make decisions when planning the trips. Very few respondents argue, that there is a strong interrelation between social media site’s involvement and change customer’s behaviors (Minazzi, 2015). Online reviews on travel and booking sites have become increasingly popular sources of information for trip planning. From the point of some travel agencies it is important to measure social media impact of customer satisfaction, through every social channel responding effectively and consistently (Schaefer, 2014).

Technological development and globalization of media create new possibilities for information sharing among visitors in tourism through web blogs, websites or destinations´ assessment sites (Zarella 2013). Destinations need creative and powerful social media marketing strategies to reach these potential visitors. Social media allow destinations to contact visitors at relatively low cost and higher levels of efficiency that can be achieved with more traditional communication tools (Kaplan and Haenlein 2010). Social media has been used as a promotional tool for interactive marketing purposes, but the constant rise of visitors that use social media applications creates new challenges for all the industry (Schmalleger and Carson 2008, Heinonen 2011, Carr and Hayes 2015).

It should be noted that the marketing potential of social media has been widely studied (Zeng and Geristen 2014, Khan and Jan 2015). Social media related topics have been investigated in the context of tourism marketing with the focus on both organizations and customers. But it is true that the main actor of social media marketing is a customer, the main focus should be on listening, communicating, educating and entertaining customer in order to achieve the successful communication strategy of social media (Sweeney and Craig 2011).

Exist many barriers hindering the tourism marketing development: high price of tourist products, lack of professional skills working in the tourist sector and the absence of social media monitoring to identify customer satisfaction. It should be noted there’s a lack of understanding of social media platforms and usage related tourism, especially in developing countries, like Georgia. Many study approves, that there is a strong need for further investigation, to foster better relationships with the customers by creating effective social media marketing platforms.

Georgia has been named among the top 16 emerging travel destinations not only for its fantastic environment, but due to activities undertaken by the Georgian government. The tourism sector is one of the most growing sectors of the country. Promotional marketing campaigns in
domestic and international markets, press and FAM trips, participating in international travel-fairs, social media marketing and other activities Georgian National Travel Agency (GNTA) facilitate the increase of tourism flow in Georgia (Georgian National Tourism Administration, 2016). Tourism companies in Georgia today are concentrating more on providing high quality service to their target customer, which is a key factor for a sustainable competitive advantage of companies. Georgia took an important step towards the development of tourism in Georgia, using a wide variety of social media marketing. GNTA signed a joint advertising agreement with Travel Website Trip Advisor. The campaign will include posts and detailed information about the country, which will increase the number of international tourists in Georgia. The challenges of consumer behavior issues were analyzed at the Marketing Department of Tbilisi State University (Apil at al., 2008; Todua, 2012; Jashi and Todua, 2013). The study of the attitude of Georgian consumers to different types and attributes of products was investigated too (Todua, Babilua and Dochviri, 2013; Todua and Jashi, 2015; Todua and Dotchviri, 2015a; Todua and Dotchviri, 2015b; Todua, Gogitidze and Phutkaradze, 2015; Meskhia, 2016; Todua, Mghebrishvili and Urotadze, 2016; Mghebrishvili and Urotadze, 2016; Todua, Gogitidze and Phutkaradze, 2017; Todua, 2017, Todua, 2018). But there is a lack of research looking at the role of social media for Promoting Georgian Tourism Industry. Consequently, the objectives of the research are to reveal the increasing role of social media in tourism, to find out how to satisfy variable demands of Georgian consumers.

Research Methodology. Qualitative and quantitative methods have been chosen for studying the and respectively, the study consisted of two steps. At the first step were selected 30 local Travelling Agencies for the qualitative survey and hypothesis formulation. In the second step were conducted online and face to face survey respondents through the country. A systematic random sampling method was used and the survey was carried out to 600 respondents by using a well-structured questionnaire. 280 men and 320 women were participated in the survey. The confidence interval is 95% and standard deviation is 1,96 %. The questionnaire included personal characteristics of the respondents and 18 statements regarding to the impact of social media marketing in promoting tourism in the country. A five-point Likert scale was employed to measure the consumers attitude and perception toward social media (Malhotra, 2008). The data collected for the study were analyzed by using SPSS version 21.0. Descriptive statistics, cross-tabulation, T-test and ANOVA were employed to analyze the respondents’ data. Along with research methodology we used variance analysis method – ANOVA (Malhotra, 2008). Numerous hypotheses were formulated, focusing on the relationship between social media and buying behavior of Georgian consumers.

H1: Activity of tourist company regarding to social media marketing positively impacts on consumers behavior;
H2: Interest in social media marketing of tourist Company positively impacts on consumers behavior;
H3: Reliability about social media marketing of tourist company positively impacts on consumers behavior;
H4: Satisfaction about social media marketing of tourist company positively impacts on buying decision of consumers.

Research Results. Marketing study showed that among the social media platforms, Facebook is mostly spread in Georgia. It is used by 95% of respondents. Then follows YouTube (47%), Instagram (31.3 %), Google+ (29.1 %), LinkedIn (25.1 %), Twitter (17.1 %) and MySpace (12.5 %). Other social networks (Vkontakte, Odnoklassniki, Pinterest, Tumblr, Flickr, Reddit, Ask.fm) are used by 13.9 % of respondents. To communicate with social networks, the majority of respondents (49 %) mostly use smartphones, 37 % - computers, 8 % - tablets, and the rest (6 %) - different devices. The aim of using social networks is variety. Based on our research, 85.7 % of respondents use social networks to get acquainted with various news, 77,8 % - to communicate with friends, 30,7 % - to spend time, 27,3 % - to get acquainted with the sites of companies, 15, 3 % for publishing their own Pictures, videos or news, and 11 % for various purposes. Respondents who get acquainted with the company's websites on social networks pay special attention to activities related to tourism. Most of them (60 %) positively relate to the web sites connected with tourism available on social networks. The main reason for this relationship 80.5 % of respondents named interesting information published by travel companies, 63.4 % - timely reception of news, 42.7 % - awareness of prizes and discounts, 35.1 % - sympathy for the company, 11.6 % - different types of activity. The survey showed that 25 % of respondents choose tourist agencies on the recommendations of relatives, 18 % - on personal experience, 8 % - according to estimates of other Internet users, 21 % - through social networks, 22 % - on the basis of incentive shares offered by agencies, 6 % - on different criteria. The study reveals,
that social media marketing activity of travel agencies increases consumer's interest and reliability which leads to customer satisfaction (See Figure 1). The result approves, that social media marketing impact on consumer’s satisfaction.

Because social networks involve two-way communication, it is very important to find out how often and in what form consumers interact with web pages related to tourism. The survey shows that 7% of respondents do this only by writing personal messages, 20% only by writing comments, 12% by the above two approaches, and 61% have no such contacts and only scans the news. It was also interesting to find out if the consumers were satisfied with the feedback they received from their own messages from the social network's pages of tourist companies. From this point of view, significant factors are timeliness of feedback from written communication, completeness and reliability of the received information, which ultimately lead to consumer satisfaction. In this case, respondents using the five-point Likert scale for estimating (see Fig.2). The analysis shows that the respondents are more or less satisfied with the response received from the social network's pages of tourist companies.

Conducted analysis of variance in order to verify the hypothesis of interest. One Way ANOVA F-Test used to understand the interaction between the independent variables and the dependent variables. At first, investigated how the activity of tourist company regarding to social media marketing influences on consumers behavior. The findings indicate the coefficient of activity is significant at the 5% level, meaning activity is a significant determinant of consumers behavior
(F=645.593, p=0.000). Based on F-statistics H1 has been supported (see Table 1).

Table 1. Impact of activity of tourist company regarding to social media marketing on consumers behavior

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Estimated Marginal Means</th>
<th>Dependent Variable: consumers behavior</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sum of Squares</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activity</td>
<td>327.378</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Error</td>
<td>543.101</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

P<0.05 means that the differences between the groups studied are statistically significant.

Source: own elaboration.

One Way ANOVA F-Test was used to test how interest in social media marketing of tourist companies impacts on consumers behavior (see Table 2). The results suggest that interest in social media marketing of tourist company plays an important role in buying decision of consumers (F=2.244, p=0.003).

Table 2. Impact of interest in social media marketing of tourist company on consumers behavior

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Estimated Marginal Means</th>
<th>Dependent Variable: consumers behavior</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sum of Squares</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interest</td>
<td>15.590</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Error</td>
<td>543.101</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

P<0.05 means that the differences between the groups studied are statistically significant.

Source: own elaboration.

In order to test the third hypothesis employed both ANOVA. The ANOVA test illustrates that reliability about social media marketing of tourist company is an important factor with regards to consumers behavior. F-test = 3.960 (p=0.001) is significant at the 5 % level. Reliability about social media marketing of tourist company influence on the consumers behavior (see Table 3).

Table 3. Impact of reliability about social media marketing of tourist company on consumers behavior

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Estimated Marginal Means</th>
<th>Dependent Variable: consumers behavior</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sum of Squares</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reliability</td>
<td>12.050</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Error</td>
<td>543.101</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

P<0.05 means that the differences between the groups studied are statistically significant.

Source: own elaboration.

One Way ANOVA F-Test has been used to check satisfaction about social media marketing of tourist company impacts on buying decision of consumers (see Table 4). The results suggest that assurance plays an important role in buying decision of consumers (F=3.668, p=0.012).

Table 4. Impact of satisfaction about social media marketing of tourist company on buying decision of consumers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Estimated Marginal Means</th>
<th>Dependent Variable: buying decision of consumers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sum of Squares</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satisfaction</td>
<td>1.997</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Error</td>
<td>110.153</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

P<0.05 means that the differences between the groups studied are statistically significant.

Source: own elaboration.
Conclusions. As a result of our marketing research, we can conclude that, despite the active use of social media by Georgian consumers, the tourism industry is still less popular for them. This is confirmed by the fact that the levels of interest, reliability and satisfaction of consumers regarding to social media marketing, provided by touristic companies, are average. In addition, the average indicators characterize the levels of satisfaction of feedback consumers, which they receive from their messages from the social network's pages of touristic companies. The study shows that social media marketing of travel companies has a great impact on the interest, reliability and satisfaction of Georgian consumers. Also, the impact of social media marketing, conducted by touristic companies, on the behavior of Georgian consumers is very important. Such marketing working is estimated by Georgian consumers at an average level, which indicates the inadequate activity of local travel companies in social networks. The results of the survey will be useful for companies operating in the Georgian tourism market, who will use modern methods of communication to attract and achieve customer loyalty.

Acknowledgment. The author gratefully acknowledges the support of Center of Marketing Research at the Tbilisi State University.

REFERENCES