Analyzing the Relationship between the Social Media and the Decision Making Process of Travelers: A Case Study of Delhi NCR

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ABSTRACT

Millennials have been exerting a peculiar fascination not only on business leaders but also on the academic experts. Since the members of Generation Y are also called Digital Natives, their life has begun with the digital environment and information technology profoundly affects how they live and work. Most of the business managers, researchers and policy makers are interested in the identification of use of social media by millennials because this can reflect the positive and negative outcomes of these digital natives and subsequently managers can design and develop their products and the product line. Most of the business managers form customer identity by analyzing their habits and their brand loyalty along with their use of social media. With this, they can also assess the purchase behavior of these consumers and their perceived value towards the business organizations. The present study focuses on the relationship between social media and the purchase decisions made by the generation with regard to their travel. The study is done on the basis of responses received from the generation Y population. A questionnaire has been designed to assess the hypothesis that there is a strong relationship between the use of social media and the travel decisions made by them. Out of total 300 responses, 244 were found to be significant. Based on the responses received inferences have been made.

Keywords: Social Media, Generation Y, Millennials, Travel Decisions

I INTRODUCTION

With more businesses going from offline to online mode the life of individuals have changed and internet technology has integrated into their daily routine. It is very much evident that after 1990 the influence of Information Technology and particularly the use of social media have revolutionized the information searching and sharing not only by the common man but also by the millennials to a great extent. (Asur & Huberman, 2010; Smith & Anderson, 2018)

People born between 1980 and 2000 have integrated the information technology and social media into their daily life and activities (Asur & Huberman, 2010; Tkalac Verčič & Verčič, 2013) and this does not seem to be a challenge for them because they can move from their local outreach to a global outreach understanding with these technologies influencing and simplifying their life(Kilian, Hennigs, & Langner, 2012).

It is widespread known that more than 80% of generation Y people want to share their information or opinion or reviews online (Kilian et al., 2012) with their friends as they can somehow influence the purchasing decisions of their friends and relatives with such opinions.

Generation Y considers the review websites as a strong source of influence from their personal experience to their influential experience while discussing their travel plans. This is also reflected in the decisions made by this generation when it comes to making travel decisions as social media not only stands for creating more friends online but also sharing information and deciding where to go, how to go there and at what particular destination they should visit. This has actually opened up a new era of options and decision making processes for this generation (Al-Badi, Tarhini, & Al-Sawaei, 2017; Fotis, Buhalis, & Rossides, 2011b, 2011a; Icoz, Kutuk, & Icoz, 2018; Sinha & Fung, 2018).

The growing number of people using social media worldwide also confirms that it has become an important activity among the users with more than 300 billion people across the length and breadth of the Nations using social media in the year 2018 (Smith & Anderson, 2018). The immense popularity of social media clearly indicates that it is not a temporary trend but it is likely to be the inseparable part of young people with more developments and technological advancement in coming years (Schroeder & Pennington-Gray, 2015).

It is clearly indicated that social media cannot be now taken away from the generation Y and generation Z as it has created an online culture that encourages its users to share their experiences and has changed the way they think and behave in their day to day life. Most of the members of this generation have taken and are taking enough time to consider whether their personal experiences should go online (Munar & Jacobsen, 2014) and their likes and dislikes should also be discussed in public domain (Cabosky, 2016).

Major social media platforms like Facebook, Snapchat and Instagram not only attract users because of the features of editing their content but also they can share their experiences and group with the like- minded people around them (Bouchillon, 2014; Davies, 2019). While sharing their experiences and reviews, sometimes this generation shows the characteristics of split personality like a difference between who they are and what they really want to project on these social media platforms (Golbeck, Robles, & Turner, 2011). A further investigation can be done to assess the split personalities on social media.

Most popular social networks worldwide as of October 2018, ranked by number of active users (in millions)

Facebook	2234
YouTube	1900
WhatsApp	1500
Facebook messenger	1300
We Chat	1058
Instagram	1000
QQ	803
Tiktok	500
Sina Weibo	431
Twitter	335
Reddit	330
LinkedIn	303
Skype	300
Snapchat	291
Viber	260
Pinterest	250
Telegram	200

(Source: https://www.statista.com)

(Rita, Brochado, & Dimova, 2018) discussed about the millennials' travel motivations and desired activities within destinations through push and pull factors and found out that 'relaxing ' and 'escape from the ordinary' are among the most motivating factors when millennials decide about their destination. The destinations need to focus on the uniqueness and provide attractive activities including availability of indigenous and local food and off the track sightseeing. Since activities contribute greatly into the overall tourist experience, the destinations which can provide a wide range of unique activities will survive for a longer time as compared to the destinations which have not diversified their tourism product range.

Millennials look for hedonic motivations at the destination and this can be reflected in the search behaviour while making the final decisions for their travel. Recording of such searches is still in the nascent age and industry has to understand the importance of these search behaviour of the millennials and record it. (Bloch, Sherrell, & Ridgway, 2002) resulted in their exploratory study about the hedonic motives of search behaviour and projected them to be important elements in the marketplace.

II BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

It is clearly indicated that social media cannot be now taken away from the generation Y and generation Z as it has created an online culture that encourages its users to share their experiences and has changed the way they think and behave in their day to day life. Each and every day new social media platforms and Apps are being designed and developed keeping this vast user base of millennials as these Apps and platforms change their lifestyles too. New social media platforms are being designed everyday and most of the people from this generation want to try and find out that how these new platforms can create a better life or a positive life to them.

Last few decades tourism has seen a lot of changes and the business has gone tremendously transformed with new preferences from the customers. It is not only the preferences of the customers but the changing Information sharing and discussing platforms which have kept industry people on their toes to identify and develop new tools to tap this ever-changing industry. With so much of ready information available on various platforms (Laroche, Habibi, & Richard, 2013; Osatuyi, 2013; Xiang & Gretzel, 2010; D. Zeng, Chen, Lusch, & Li, 2010) generation y has become more critical and often try to compare prices, guest reviews and collect useful information online rather than going to a travel agent or an information centre. Generation Y forms their opinion with the reviews and online information available more quickly. It is therefore the need of the hour that marketers should evolve their marketing strategies keeping this uses of social media by generation Y and Z. This paper also wants to analyze the relationship between the social media and the decision making process of travelers.

In the tourism literature, a number of research articles (Diga & Kelleher, 2009; Keegan & Rowley, 2017; Metaxas & Mustafaraj, 2012; Power & Phillips-Wren, 2011; Schroeder & Pennington-Gray, 2015; B. Zeng & Gerritsen, 2014) have clearly defined that how Technology can influence the decision making choices of the travelers. This study is empirical in nature and a quantitative research approach has been employed keeping the objectives in consideration. The research has been done among the members of millennials community in Delhi NCR.

The main research objective is to assess the impact of social media on the decision making process of millennials in their travel plans. Hypothesis was formulated on the basis of research objective and an online questionnaire was circulated among the members of millennials. To collect data, an online survey questionnaire was designed and the respondents were asked about their choices on different aspects which could certify their use of social media for making travel decisions. Total 244 responses were collected through a self-administered questionnaire.

III DATA ANALYSIS

One-Sample Statistics

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Which is the most used social network by you	244	2.7049	1.06333	.06807

One-Sample Test

	Test Value = 3					
					95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Lower	Upper
Which is the most used social network by you	107.166	243	.000	-7.29508	-7.4292	-7.1610

The p-value of the test is 0.000, which is less than the level of significance 0.05. The one sample t-test statistic is 107.166 and the p-value from this statistic is .000 and that is less than 0.05 (the level of significance usually used for the test) Such a p-value indicates that the most used social network of the sampled population is statistically significantly different from that the most used social network of the population.

Out of 244 responses received through this questionnaire, 47.1% were the female students whereas 52.9% were male members. Since this study is being conducted among the members of generation Y who are born between 1981 to 2000 so it was evident that most of them have started using computers, smartphones and other technological devices in the past 5 to 10 years.


I use social media
244 responses
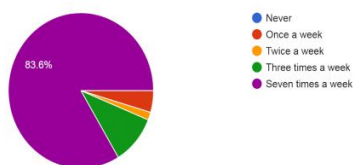
When these respondents were asked about their use of social media during the entire week, it was found out that 83.6 % of the respondents use social media everyday whereas there was a very less number of people who used social media only once in a week.

How much time of a day do you spend using social media
244 responses
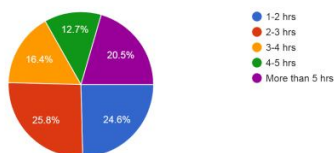
As far as the time is spent by generation Y everyday on social media was concerned, it was found that 20.5% of the respondents use social media for more than 5 hours and 24.6 percent people use social media for 1 to 2 hours every day. 25.8 percent of the respondents use social media for 2 to 3 hours every day.

Which is the most used social network by you
244 responses
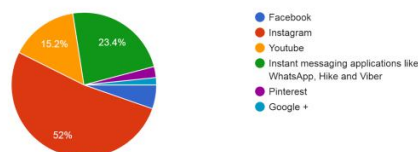
On asking about the social network used by generation Y, it was found out that more than 50% (52%) of the members of generation Y now are on Instagram which allows them to update their experiences as soon as they undertake a trip or finish it. It was very much surprising to note that Facebook users have come down to 13% only which shows the decline of once leader of social networks. Instant messaging application like WhatsApp, Hike and Viber are also being used significantly by 23.4 % by the members of generation Y.

How many times in a year do you travel?
244 responses
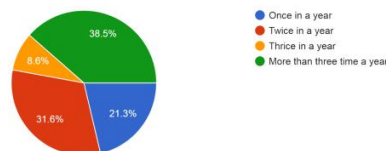
On asking about their frequency of travel in a year, 38.5% respondents travel for more than 3 times a year whereas 31.6 percent of the respondents travel twice in a year. 21.3% percent of the respondent travel only once in a year. 36.9% respondents say that they always want to go on short duration trips. As far as the vacation trips of more than 7 days are concerned, only 12.7% of the respondents clearly indicated that they want to travel for more than 7 days in a year whereas almost equal 25% of the respondents want to go on weekend trips or extended weekend trips.
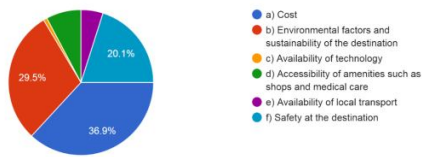

More often, my prime purpose of undertaking a holiday is?
244 responses
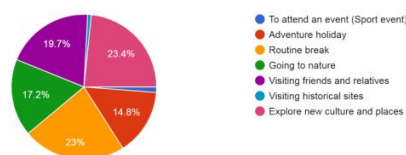
While inquiring about the prime purpose of their holiday, it was found out that 23.4 percent of the respondents always want to explore new culture and places whereas same 23% want to have a routine break from their mundane work and 19.7% percent of the respondents visit their friends and relatives. While asking about their preference of going to nature, only 17.2 % responded wished to go to natural sites and very few of them want to visit historical sites.

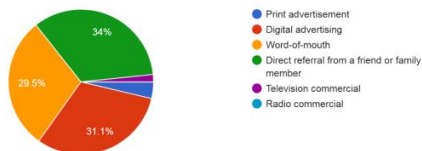For me, the main practical concerns while choosing a holiday destination is?
244 responses

- a) Cost
- b) Environmental factors and sustainability of the destination
- c) Availability of technology
- d) Accessibility of amenities such as shops and medical care
- e) Availability of local transport
- f) Safety at the destination

36.9% percent of the respondents clearly state that they look after the cost while deciding about their holiday destination. 20.1 % respondents also care about the safety at the destination as it has been many a times debated that India is not a safe country so the government has to look upon this important aspect, not only for domestic tourists but also for the international tourist and make destinations secure.

In the past, what has been the most influential in terms of helping you decide where to go/stay/eat, etc. when you're traveling?
244 responses

- Print advertisement
- Digital advertising
- Word-of-mouth
- Direct referral from a friend or family member
- Television commercial
- Radio commercial

Most of the millennials have been influenced by some kind of promotional activities by the companies and 31.1% of the people of this generation always find out digital advertising which has prompted them to think of their destination. It is also worthy to note that 34% of the respondents always take a referral from a friend or a family member.

When booking traveling, do you read other traveler's reviews of the locations and/or accommodations?
244 responses

- Yes
- No
- Sometimes
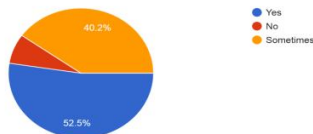
It is impressive to note that more than 52.5 % of the respondents check reviews of other travelers before they finalize any destination or location or accommodation for their future travel.

Do you think that the reviews made by travelers on reviews sites like TripAdvisor, WAYN, Travelocity and Expedia are biased?
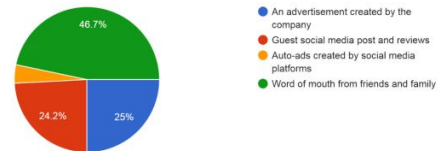244 responses

- Yes
- No
- Sometimes
- Can't say
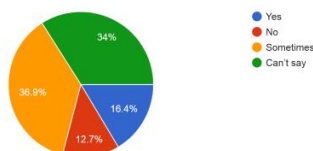
This generation believes in their own decisions and the reviews made by other travelers for a particular service is sometimes believed by 56.6% respondents whereas 11.5% respondents never rely on the reviews made by other travelers on review sites like TripAdvisor. It is 13.9% of the respondents rely on the reviews. On asking

about the reviews made on review sites weather these are biased or not, 36.9% of the respondents claimed that they believed the reviews to be biased sometimes where as 16.4% of the respondents said that they believe the reviews are biased. 34% of the respondents also felt that they have no knowledge about these review sites being biased


In terms of advertising, which would you trust more?
244 responses

- An advertisement created by the company
- Guest social media post and reviews
- Auto-ads created by social media platforms
- Word of mouth from friends and family

46.3% of the respondents have a buying experience on the social media sites and platforms. But at the same time it also needs to be accounted that 45.1% respondents have never tried buying a service on social media. Moreover 82.4% of the respondents believe that they have always looked for more about a destination after an advertisement on social media

Have you ever booked a trip to a destination or hotel through social media?
244 responses

- Yes
- No
- Sometimes
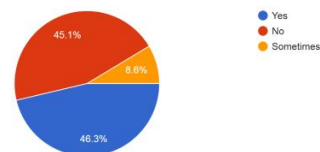
It is also observed that this generation books most of the air travel product online as it can be seen that 53.7% of the respondents have accepted their bookings done through online media. They mostly believe on word of mouth from friends and family as it is 46.7% of the respondents have claimed that.

I think the social media is a new word of mouth
244 responses

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree
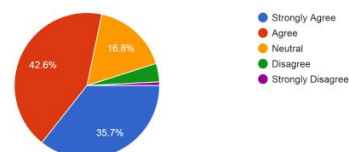
The business houses have to realize now that word of mouth is a strong effect on the buying patterns of the generation Y members so they have to be very careful in design and delivery of their products online and in operations. (Aarikka-Stenroos & Makkonen, 2014) identified the different roles of references and word of mouth and suggested that experience based information offers a real time solution to many problems arising out of expectations and satisfactions gaps in the buying process.

Marketeers can always tap this potential of social media as it is very much evident from 59% of the respondents that they are neutral when they were asked about the products being sold on social media platforms and 19.3% of the respondents believe that it is not true that

product sold on social media are not trustworthy so it clearly signifies that social media can be used to promote tourism related products.

IV FINDINGS

Out of 244 respondents 71.7 % were born between 1996 and 2000 and 23.8% were born between 1991 and 1995. Since it is the time to utilize social media at its best that is why most of these young generation people are on social media and the study found only 0.8% percent people not on the social media. 83.6% respondents use social media everyday which clearly indicates that the generation Y is purely on social media and they want to share their experiences and seek information almost every day of the week. Almost each of the respondents spends a significant time on using social media every day.

It was clearly identified that generation Y members have a good frequency of travel and they always have social media around them which impacts their decision making of travelling.

As far as frequency of their travel is concerned, it is clearly evident that most of the generation Y members are frequent visitors to places and they want to go on short vacation trips. The data clearly indicates that their preferences for travelling and undertaking holiday is changing and more and more people of this generation want to explore new cultures and visit natural and adventure sites.

Although, it has been widely discussed that this generation has a disposable income to spend upon their luxuries and travel but majority of the respondents clearly state that they look after the cost while deciding about their holiday destination. At the same time it is also very encouraging to note that this generation looks after the environmental factors and sustainability of the destination which is a good sign and a clear indication that future destination have to look after the sustainability and responsible behavior at the destination.

A good number of respondents clearly indicate that tourism industry works on word to mouth promotion and destinations have to have their image that way so that they can attract more and more tourist with referral programs.

Nowadays all tourists want to read reviews before they finalize any destination for their future travel and this generation is not away from such reviews. This generation wants to review and find out the reviews of other tourist as well who have previously travelled to destinations. The review sites have to work a lot in providing a trustworthy content to the visitors on their site. This can further be studied that how these review sites can make a significant space into the future decisions by the travelers.

Social media has become a great place to promote tourism related products by the marketeers since it is clearly visible. A lot of work is to be done to promote tourism related products through social media and where 99% population of young people are available on social media platforms, the power of this kind of media can never be overlooked by the marketeers.

It is also noteworthy to see that most of the advertisement created by company or travel agencies is not liked by the Millennials as most of them believe on referrals.

V DISCUSSIONS

There is no doubt that social media has a great impact on the lifestyle and decision making of generation Y. They take decisions very quickly and they are technologically so advanced that they have options to seek more information on a particular issue. Travel decision making is a complex process and comprises of many levels of emotional and dynamic processes. With shifting behaviours of millennials, it has become more complex and marketers find it very difficult to understand this complex behaviour of millennials and further making their marketing and promotional strategies difficult to design. Tourists search for information related to their travel decisions prior to their departures but millennials are a little different on this aspect and they continue searching for different information even after reaching at the the choice of their destination. Most of the time their source of information are local residents of a destination and the advice given by the local residents influence their decision making. Numerous researchers have analysed consumer's information search prior to arrival at a destination but this shifting source of information of millennials have created a new area of debate in the research. A more comprehensive description can be found in the study conducted by (DiPietro, Wang, Rompf, & Severt, 2007) who have attempted to continue to fill a research gap focusing on travelers' information search behaviour for services not only before the trip but in transit to the destination and once at a destination. Increasing use of technology not only by the millennials but also by the service providers have greatly expanded the resources available to make travel decisions. Today, travel decisions are much influenced by information gathered electronically prior to departure, in transit and while at a destination.

In this study, it is clearly indicated that social media cannot be now taken away from the generation Y and generation Z (Fuciu & Dumirescu, 2014; Pate & Adams, 2013; Sethi & Bhargava, 2015) as it has created an online culture that encourages its users to share their experiences and has changed the way they think and behave in their day to day life. Most of the members of this generation have taken and are taking enough time to consider whether their personal experiences should go online and their likes and dislikes should also be discussed in public domain (Brown, 2008; Sheeran & Cummings, 2018). With this instant information

available, they take their decisions very fast and in terms of their travels also their decision making is so prompt that they want to go to a destination just after looking at a post on social media from their friends or from the promotional companies. This signifies that social media has a great impact on the decision making of this generation and marketeers have to have their presence online to attract this great segment of potential customers (Constantinides, 2014; Rayat, Rayat, & Rayat, 2017; Saravanakumar & SuganthaLakshmi, 2012; SI, 2015). They have to design marketing strategies to attract this segment.

VI SCOPE FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Since the study was conducted among the members of generation y, it can also further be conducted among the members of generation Z. Also the study can further be extended pan India as it was conducted only in Delhi NCR. Decision related to food habits during the holidays can also be discussed further as there has been a very little or no research done on this aspect of millennials. As there was no question asking on how they are not comfortable on social media, the study proposes a future research to discuss about this question that what is taking some people out of social media and what are the disadvantages of using social media. The present study shows the relationship of social media usage and the decision making process of young generation and paves the way for the future researchers to explore the level of marketing efforts to attract this segment.

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