

A STUDY OF DIGITAL MARKETING OF MICE TOURISM IN INDIA

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Abstract: The present research paper aims is to provide a theoretical framework for understanding the concepts of Big Data Analytics and social media and their role in the marketing of MICE tourism. The systematic review of the literature done contributes to exploring and enhancing the comprehension of various models and strategic alternatives affecting the utilization and adoption of social media marketing.

Keywords: Big Data, MICE Tourism, Social Media, Digital Marketing.

Introduction:

New advancements in technology and innovations in Information and Communication Technology (ICT), specifically in Social Media have an immense impact on business practices; strategies and industry structure (Babu & Subramoniam, 2016) . Social networks provide a system of community building, customized to the needs of its members to fortify customer relations. Marketing through social media is particularly critical in MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conventions and Exhibitions) tourism industry where potential customers make highly poignant and lavish purchases, which are in most likeliness to be unique occurrences that cannot be replicated in case of a service failure (Phelan, Chen, & Haney, 2013). MICE tourism has been predicted as the future of business tourism (MRSS India, 2016) . Big data is considered to be a highly potent tool built so far, and is at the heart of a smart revolution in the tourism industry, worldwide. It helps hotels and convention centres to understand their target customers better, optimize their processes and drive business performances using business insights (Marr, 2015).

The objective of this research paper is to provide a theoretical framework (Bumblauskas, Nold, Bumblauskas, & Igou, 2017) into the uncharted territory of social media marketing of MICE tourism. The paper intends to provide, primarily a rich understanding of the key concepts and concerns regarding big data analytics (Ducange, Pecori, & Mezzina, 2018) , MICE tourism, and social media marketing. The research also highlights, through an extensive review of literature, some prominent models and strategies that may be used to unlock the potential value of

processing high volumes of fast-moving and diverse data using Business Data Analytics (BDA) into meaningful insights to drive decision-making (Verma & Bhattacharyya, 2017) for hotels and convention centers.

Literature Review

Big Data Analytics:

The Internet has experienced a continual evolution and progression, creating digital traces that can be gathered and administered to define systems useful to discuss both individual and group behaviour. Data with such enormous capacities are becoming a primary feature of our modern society. Moreover, the ability to scrutinize, connect and learn from this data is turning into a valuable component for organizations to compete and support growth, production and innovation in diverse fields. (Ducange, Pecori, & Mezzina, 2018). Maturing and diversification of Internet technologies made it an excellent forum for organizations to communicate. (Pries & Dunnigan, 2015). The upsurge of data from various digital sources like social networks and the Internet has challenged marketers to convert them into actionable insights. (Kumar, et al., 2013). Big data is a recent occurrence that has surfaced as a part of our everyday lives. Shopping online, catching up with Facebook friends, steering web searches, swiping our cards, and reading articles referencing database searches, leads to tying a piece of classifying data, called big data. (Pries & Dunnigan, 2015).

Big Data, is defined comprehensively by (Pries & Dunnigan, 2015) in their research paper as "(1) The data proliferation, both structured and unstructured, as the result of exponential growth in capabilities of computer processing power, data storage capacity, the use of computers to mediate transactions and social interactions, and the density of sensors, all at a decreasing cost; (2) The computer hardware and software infrastructure that has been created to quickly and accurately draw insights from large volumes of highly variable and often unstructured, data appearing at a voluminous arrival rate. This is accomplished through methods including, but not limited to distributed processing, in-memory data storage, job partitioning, parallel processing and sparse array management." Big Data Analytics, or, BDA is the process of examining huge amounts of data in an effort to discover hidden patterns, unfamiliar correlations and other valuable information. (He, Wang, & Akula, 2017). The Five V's model has been discussed by (Bumblauskas, Nold, Bumblauskas, & Igou, 2017) to define BDA as "A holistic approach to manage, process and analyze the five V's data related dimensions i.e., Volume (huge quantity of data); Velocity (pace at which data flows); Variety (different types of data); Veracity (genuineness and accuracy of data); and Value (data's economic benefits) in order to create actionable insights for sustained value delivery, measuring performance and establishing competitive advantages".

Further to this model, (Ducange, Pecori, & Mezzina, 2018) in their study have discussed a Nine V's model, where in addition to the earlier five V's, four additional dimensions are added. These are Variability (changes over time); Visualization

(making data interpretable); Validity (correct usage); and Volatility (retention policy of data), in order to understand the scope of big data analytics in a better way. This model is depicted in Figure 1, as below.

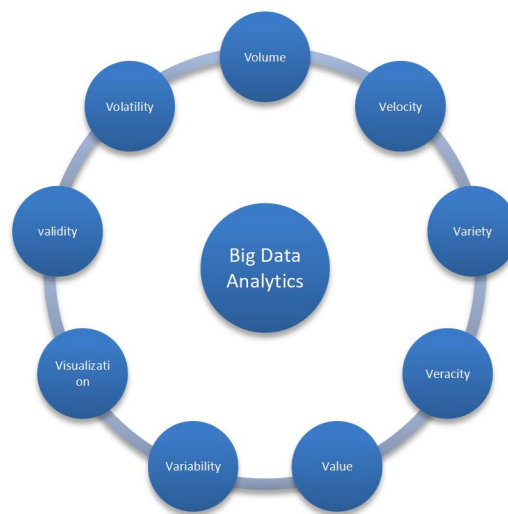


Fig. 1. Nine V's Model of Big Data Analytics (Ducange, Pecori, & Mezzina, 2018)

MICE Tourism

Tourism has become one of the key players in international business and represents one of the essential sources of income for both developed and developing countries (Costa, 2017). Amongst the several forms of tourism that exist in the world, Meetings, Incentives, Conventions and Exhibitions (MICE) segment of the tourism industry has shown the maximum growth potential. With a 54% market share globally, it has surpassed the traditional business trips segment. MICE Tourism is part of the tertiary sector of the economy, which brings together a diverse set of services. Many stakeholders are participants in this industry and may be classified roughly under three major heads. The chief and the most vital one is the physical infrastructure (Hotels and Convention centres) which comprises of the venue where the actual meetings, conventions and exhibitions are held; next in line are the Organizers (Professional Convention Organizers) of the meetings and finally the Fringe subcontractors (Travel agencies, transportation, catering, etc.), who are responsible for various services that make the event efficacious (MRSS India, 2016) . The convention and exhibition market has experienced unmatched growth during the past 20 years (Seaton & Bennett, 2000) . Due to a large number of financial benefits of hosting conventions, many destinations and convention facilities are aggressively competing with each other. It is essential for hotels and convention centres to establish an enduring relationship with key customers, associations and meeting organizers to stabilize a revenue stream (Lee & Back, 2005).

Social Media Marketing

(He, Wang, & Akula, 2017) Defines social media “as an entity that consists of online technologies, practices or communities that people use to generate content and share opinions, insights, experiences and perspectives”. It is crucial, and a powerful instrument used to create buzz and apprise customers about a product or service. However, global marketers are researching to understand how the enormous amount of knowledge found on social media may be harnessed and targeted to achieve their brand objectives. (Kumar, et al., 2013) . The likelihood of entering into a sender’s profile and finding information about them is what most differentiates a social network from other websites. Social Media is bringing in a phenomenal shift in the ways that businesses are marketing themselves to their customers, compelling a rethink of the traditional marketing strategies. The proliferation of smartphones has completely changed the world of marketing. Consumers now can be reached at any time in practically any place. Also, with so many online rating and social networking websites where people can publish their opinions give a remarkable opportunity for companies to be directly involved with their customers. (Rosman & Stuhura, 2013). A smart mobile phone is in reality, a small computer and has made way into the core of our lives. Each time it is turned on or off, or a website is visited with it, or an application is used, a data point is created. Moreover, online advertising, viewing habits on Netflix, Facebook posts, Google searches, create data points. These examples of data generated by us, apart from being used for business purposes, empower others to structure how our world responds to us, as researched by (Pries & Dunnigan, 2015) . Social media has eventually evolved as an essential channel of marketing and Facebook is considered to be the largest social media enterprise, across the world. (Hansson, Wrangmo, & Søylen, 2013) Observe that Marketing through Facebook is an established concept. Using Facebook, it is possible for organizations to accomplish their marketing and branding targets at a reasonably low cost. Most of the users post an accurate sketch of their profiles on Facebook, comprising their age, relationship status, likings, gender and work profiles. It is a benefit that Facebook uses to sell genuineness to prospective advertisers. Companies can reach out to their target customer segments by matching their products to the customer's profile. This helps in creating a dialogue and nurturing the relationship with loyal customers, by knowing their attitude towards the brand. In turn, customers also support in endorsing the brand and sharing positive associations and their ‘wow moments’ with the brand on its Facebook page. (Phelan, Chen, & Haney, 2013) Further observe that Facebook as a well-accepted social networking platform has the highest volume of circulation, and sustains the largest and fastest growing market share amongst all social network providers, globally. It is thus both, imperative and critical for businesses to manage their Facebook page to their best competitive advantage. (Kandampully, Zhang, & Bilgihan, 2015) Have tried to reason out why the online marketplaces of the 21st century, have compelled organizations to transform the way they do business. It is the fundamental changes in customer's lifestyle, increasing demand for superior services and extensive use of ICT, mobile phones, and social media through the Internet, which are responsible for this change. This highlights the need for companies to adapt to customer's new mindsets in order to sustain their relevance. Contemplating further

on the new role of customers in the service industry, (Zeithaml, Bitner, Gremler, & Pandit, 2015) refer customers as partial employees, as they play an active role in producing services for themselves with little or no personal interaction with the service providers. There are other roles that service customers perform with their extensive adaptation of technology and the presence of social media. They contribute significantly to service value; determine, in turn, the level of a company's technological adaptation and breathe life in social network communities. Customer's role thus has protracted, more importantly, to jointly owning the brand and its success. (Kandampully, Zhang, & Bilgihan, 2015) . A deep understanding of customers' needs and the way they like to interact with the company is most crucial for modern interactive marketing. This significantly impacts the company's ability to deliver personalized experiences which customers find valuable and pleasant (Stone & Woodcock, 2014).

Digital Marketing of MICE Tourism

The MICE tourism segment is one of the fastest developing segments of world tourism (Mistilis & Dwyer, 1999) . Over the past decades, the progression of MICE tourism has sparked a cognizance of the economic importance of this segment to national markets. Conventions fast track the growth of overall travel and tourism activities through repeat visits and Word of Mouth (WOM) communication. Meeting professionals and meeting providers have to face frequent changes in technology as technology affects the marketing and management of conventions (Lee & Back, 2005) . In their research, (Tsiotsou & Ratten, 2010) observe that globally, tourism companies are swiftly changing due to the globalization of markets, aggressive competition and advancements in new technology. Tourism is a service industry that has a long value-chain and is rigorously dependent on information technology. ICT has given way to the massive growth of tourism and has changed the way tourism companies do business (Stiakakis & Georgiadis, 2011) . Economical and easy access to Internet has unlocked the potential of social media marketing and has made it feasible for companies to reach out directly to millions of customers in innovative ways, that was impossible previously (Hansson, Wrangmo, & Søylen, 2013) . Customers today, spend a significant amount of time creating content and posting it on social networking websites. This behoves the business community and is immensely crucial for hotels to keep abreast of the latest trends, to effectively market themselves (Rosman & Stuhura, 2013) . (Phelan, Chen, & Haney, 2013) , highlights the rapid growth in Internet-based travel planning in recent years, reshaping the tourism landscape and forcing business hotels to widen the scope of their traditional marketing and branding strategies. From the customer's point of view also, the widespread accessibility of social networks has significantly transformed the way tourists make purchase decisions, research about destinations, make travel and stay reservations, learn about new proposals, plan itineraries and converse with the service providers.

Websites

It is a common practice for associations, meeting planners, and professional conference organizers to set up a website for every event. It includes exhaustive information about the venue, program schedule, major attractions, and travel options. (Lee & Back, 2005). The website helps the convention organizers to contact delegates and market their event to potential attendees in an effective way. These are a successful marketing tool for managing delegate registrations, posting convention-related surveys, submitting conference papers and providing meeting information in a cost-efficient manner, thereby facilitating in meeting the expectations of a typical meeting attendee, who is knowledgeable, middle-aged and Internet-affable. (Jang, Hu, & Bai, 2006) Find a large number of hotels using their websites to nurture customer relationships. Table 1 shows three prominent levels of website design (i.e. Basic, Accountable and Partnership) in the growing order of features offered and the quality of customer engagement.

Table 1. Levels of Website design and customer engagement (Jang, Hu, & Bai, 2006)

Levels	Description	Website Features
1. Basic	Co. sells products and encourages customers to call for an enquiry	Company profile, contact details, map
2. Accountable	Co. builds more profound relationships with customers by soliciting product improvement suggestions	Customer service page (FAQs), local search engines, feedback and chat, updated annual reports
3. Partnership	The company works continuously with customers to deliver better value	Loyalty programs, member hotline, personalized accounts

(Stringam & Gerdes Jr, 2010) Observes that there has been a shift towards a more graphical website design used by hotels. Use of photographs and pictorial illustrations on their homepage and on the website has been found out to be a significant factor in both, website appeal and influence to purchase. Other aspects that consumers value in a website are easy navigation, loyalty towards the brand and website aesthetics. (Phelan , Christodoulidou , Countryman , & Kistner , 2011) Further, reinstate through their findings that booking decisions are positively related to a website's aesthetic appeal, and that presence of photographs on a hotel's website was the most significant factor impacting website appeal and influencing booking decisions, as shown in Fig. 2.



Figure 2. Website heuristics model

Facebook

Facebook helps a tourism company differentiate itself in a competitive market by having in-depth knowledge of how customers explore and deduce information. Customers search for travel partners, destination, financial resource request, travel time, attractions at the destination, period of stay, accommodation selection, eating options, etc. to name a few (Phelan, Chen, & Haney, 2013). Amount and precision of this information can be used to convert casual browsers to buyers and eventually loyal customers. The information available on the hotel's Facebook page can have a substantial impact on the purchase decision of potential clientele. Customers tag their friends, share their pictures and post comments on their Facebook accounts, making their experiences visible to a broad audience. The option of 'Check-in' on Facebook permits users to share locations visited by them. Location generating via mobile apps feature permits travellers to search for information about the destination while on-site easily. These create trip suggestions and helps the traveller enquire about hotel recommendations based on previous traveller's experience. Tourists share their experiences and opinions after visiting a property. These reveal their quantum of satisfaction and considerably influences casual browsers. Satisfied customers post messages on Facebook to complement services and inquire about possibilities of reservation for a later date and inquire about special offers. These behavioural changes on the part of the customers have led to evolving pricing and distribution strategies. It also provides a forum for managers to engage customers, observe their feedbacks, manage interactions and look out for sales opportunities.

Strategies

(Stiakakis & Georgiadis , 2011) While studying the interaction between tourist organizations, customers and other customers, proposes three drivers of e-business strategies as i) Customizing tourist products, personalize services and support mobile services; ii) Distributing updated information related to tourism opportunities; and iii) Offering customized products by supporting content created by customers., as depicted in Fig. 3.

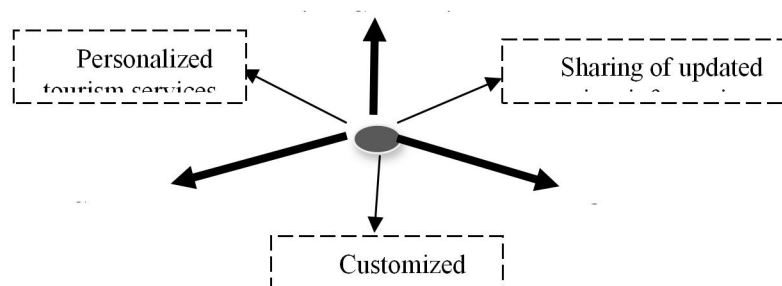


Fig. 3 E-business strategies for tourism (Stiakakis & Georgiadis , 2011)

(Ducange, Pecori, & Mezzina, 2018) Suggests a model (as shown in Fig. 4) integrate marketing strategies with big data techniques. The model has four phases: i) Defining the strategic social media domain (which includes, identifying the specific contexts from which information is to be mined depending on the topic chosen, markets and stakeholders); ii) Selecting the most productive big data technology (social media monitoring services like Radian 6 and T-Lab are readily available for data analytics); iii) Extracting and interpreting knowledge (paradigms based on emotions rather than on price and cost alone, evaluated by content analysts using sentiment analysis); and iv) Elaborating the result reports (various types of reports like word clouds, influence viewer and river of news may be used to report results to support decisions).

The outcomes of this model may help consolidate and improve the strategic domain, the deployed technologies and the outcomes of marketing MICE tourism.



Figure 4. Model to apply big data to marketing (Ducange, Pecori, & Mezzina, 2018)

Conclusion and future perspectives:

Big data and social media have revolutionized the way MICE tourism is being marketed. A thorough literature review and study of theoretical constructs point towards the following aspects, hotels and convention centres must incorporate in their marketing strategies to be relevant in the market:

- i. There is a shift towards 'Partnership – level' of website design, with customer-oriented features such as personalized accounts and loyalty programs, to enable organizations to work closely with their customers in order to deliver better value.
- ii. Presence of photographs on hotel's website is seen to impact its aesthetic appeal, which in turn is the most critical factor that influences customer's booking decision.
- iii. Hotels must actively manage their Facebook page to monitor customer feedback, interactions and identify sales opportunities.
- iv. Hotels must provide customized services and tailor-made solutions to cater to the diverse needs of the MICE segment of tourism.
- v. Hotels should work towards integrating their digital marketing strategies with Big Data technologies.

In a nutshell, Customer's transition from searching for information online to making a purchase decision and ultimately becoming a loyal customer is dependent on customers' developing an emotional connection to the service provider better than the competitors; and hotels ability to deliver individualized service support, sharing photographs and videos of events with customers, and soliciting customer experience through polls and contests. (Tsotsou & Ratten, 2010)

Although this research paper has accomplished its objectives, there are a few areas where additional studies and empirical research may be undertaken in future to build upon the theoretical framework discussed here. A few areas of interest for future research may be to examine the financial impact on the hotel's performance after adopting social media marketing strategies; or to study the marketing effect of combination of Facebook and associated services like Instagram on performance; and a comprehensive investigation regarding customer's expectations, attitude and satisfaction towards a hotel's Facebook page could be conducted.

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