

Using of Social Media Features in Tourism Management The case of Using Social Media in Georgia

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Abstract

Social media, as one of most powerful online networking tools, has been integrated into a part of social and economic life in the world. The role of social media in tourism has been increasingly noted and researched as an emerging topic. Social media plays an important role in many aspects of tourism, especially in information search and decision-making behaviours. The paper discusses about the concepts of social media and other aspects like the growth and benefits, role and relevance of social media marketing strategies in tourism.

The research includes how tourism companies use Social Media in Georgia, what kind of actions exist in Georgian tourism business. Exactly how they use that platforms in the marketing activities of the company, even though if they realize role of social media, as a great opportunity to establish effective communication with customers.

Key words: Social media, Tourism Management, hotel, customer communication.

J.E.L. classification: M11

1. Introduction

The meaning of the term "social media" can be derived from two words which constitute it. *Media generally refers to advertising and the communication of ideas or information through publications/channels. Social implies the interaction of individuals within a group or community.* So from these two separate terms, we can pull a basic definition together: social media simply refers to communication/publication platforms which are generated and sustained by the interpersonal interaction of individuals through the specific medium or tool. The tourism industry is a mix of different services. Any type of tourism product is desirable to use social media.

Social media has made a huge impact on tourism industry. The tourism industry is primed to take advantage of social media outlets, as the industry has long relied largely on destination reputation, consumer opinion, spread of information, and positive word-of-mouth advertising. Social media plays a very important role in the tourism industry. Also, consumers engage with social networking sites to research trips, make informed decisions about their travels and share their personal experience of a particular hotel, restaurant or airline.

Many countries regard social media as an important tool to promote their tourism industries. Georgia is a country, where tourist companies have started using social media for several years already. The companies realized that Social media sites and platforms still make good advertising channels.

2. Theoretical background

Use of social media as a key tool of integrated marketing communications in Georgia is becoming an important aspect for the companies. Social media research is useful for the type of companies who try to reach its target market and position brand with fewer expenses.

According to Livingstone's director, Georgian companies are afraid of different and extraordinary campaigns. They tend to follow the general trend and wait for who will be the first. If today's business is successful, others should have one step ahead. Although social media operators say that there are no rules in this field, but the success of social media must follow certain principles of the company (Enekidze, 2014, p.35).

In 2016 year, a lot of marketing activities were carried out in Georgia (GEL 22,540,000 was spent). Organized by the National Tourism Administration, 590 journalists and 275 tour operators from different countries of the world visited Georgia. 660 articles were published in international media.

In the same year Trip-Advisor had a wide range of campaigns. The campaign was very prominent, which name was Check in Georgia. Programs, documentaries and stories about Georgia were broadcasted on TV, which was broadcasted by 10 countries all around the world.

The first conference of Digital Marketing was held for the first time by the initiative of the National Tourism Administration in Georgia. The conference was discussed in the theme "Tourism in the Digital World". Participants were Google's industrial Manager Dimitri Schillick, National Geographic's photographer Victor Lima, Impact hub Vienna representative Kai Ichmen, Social Media Manager Ana Sampio Baroi, photographer and traveller - Aureliyan Batin.

At the National Geographic's Travellers Awards ceremony, Georgia was named as the best tourist destination of 2016 year.

It should be noted, that compared to previous years, the tourism national administration devotes more attention to social media and digital marketing. However, these steps are not enough. In this direction, the National Tourism Administration has much more work. More social campaigns are needed, because most of the tourists are active internet users.

In 2016, according to the National Tourism Administration, 1270 people have been trained in different spheres of tourism, however no human retraining has been done in digital marketing and social media. In rare companies where social media specialists work, their status and pay with it are quite low. With such approach, social media development is very difficult.

Hotel developments are important for the new opportunities of jobs and stimulate the local economies. Generally hotels provide the two types of the services: accommodation and dining services. Customers of this industry include the foreign visitors, domestic households and institutional buyers.

3. Methodology

Hotels are the main and popular source of accommodations for more than 50% of foreign visitors. Due to increased demand of accommodations the every segment of the hotel industry has been steady expanded.

The hotel is one of the first establishments that meets the guest and creates the first impression about the country. According to this background, its importance is clear for everyone. The hotel must provide a foreign guest with important information about Georgia, to introduce the value of Georgian culture, do all the best to get a positive emotion and they want to share this emotion as many people as possible.

Based on this, it is important to see, how actively Georgian hotels use social media. We have selected 7 hotels for research: Rooms Hotel Kazbegi, old Tbilisi boutique hotel, Tiflis palace, Biltmore Tbilisi, Coliseum marina Hotel, Borjomi palace resort & spa and Radisson Blue Iveria.

We have studied 7 web pages of hotels. There are 2 webpages examples of the worst/the best.

- Kvareli Eden (the worst web-page from our research) - Last information on the site was posted on August 5, 2013. Posted information is not perfect, there isn't gallery. The photos of the covers are good quality, but small quantities. Do not have a map. The font does not read well. The web is functioning in 2 languages. On the site mostly dominates yellow – the symbolic of autumn and grapes.

- Rooms Hotel Kazbegi (the best web-page from our research) – unfortunately, the site is only available in English. Upon entering the site the user can see not only about hotel, but also there is possible to see information about Kazbegi, which is attractive and profitable. In addition, the hotel has a reservation feature. We encounter video footage with a wide variety of photographs

on the site. Information about all rooms is exhausted. However, the information is not available at the beginning of the website, which may cause the user to be confused. One of the best part of this site is – *Explore*. It offers customers the original and different options for visiting Kazbegi. This information is perfectly placed on the site and has a wide choice of customers.

Table no. 1: Georgian hotels' web-pages

Hotels	e-mail	Tel:	Feedback	Gallery	language	Share button	map	Booking.com	Trip-advisor	Facebook	Instagram	Twitter
Biltmore hotel Tbilisi www.millenniumhotels.com	-	+	+	+	7	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
Kvareli Eden www.kvarelieden.ge	+	+	-	-	2	-	+	+	-	+	+	-
Rooms hotel Kazbegi www.roomshotels.com	+	+	+	+	1	+	-	+	+	+	+	-
Tiflis Palace www.tiflispalace.ge	+	+		+	3	+	+	+	-	+	-	+
Coliseum Marina www.colosseummarina.ge	+	+		+	3	+	+	+	+	+	+	-
Borjomi Palace Resort & Spa www.borjomipalace.ge	+	+		+	3	+	+	+		+	+	-
Radisson Blue Iveria www.reddisonblue.com	+	+	+	+	2	+	+	+	+	+	+	+

Source: Authors' contribution

Most of the Facebook pages we have studied are inactive. Not too often posted. Page user is inactive. Most of the posts have few likes. Also there is very low indicator of feedback. Information on FB is exhausted in most cases. To find out more information, the post is always accompanied by a telephone number. It should be noted that the posts posted on FB are very formal and contain only information.

4. Findings

Social media users will actively use social networks and expect companies to get interested. We held interviews from 140 people. Results are:

Figure no. 1: Do you read advertisements and posts from different companies?

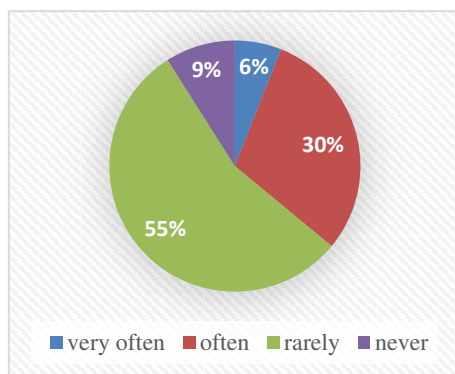
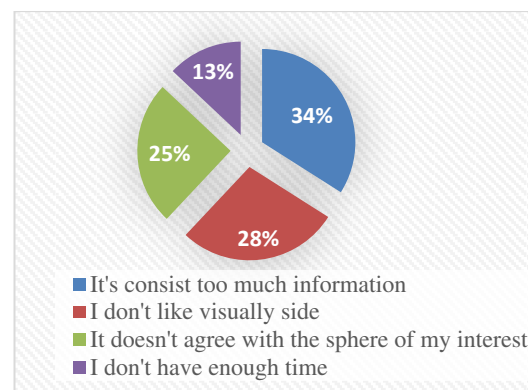


Figure no. 2: If you do not pay attention posts or advertisements, what is the reason of this?



Source: Authors' contribution

The survey shows that consumers are waiting more activity from companies.

Figure no. 3: What kind of published posts do you read the most of the company?

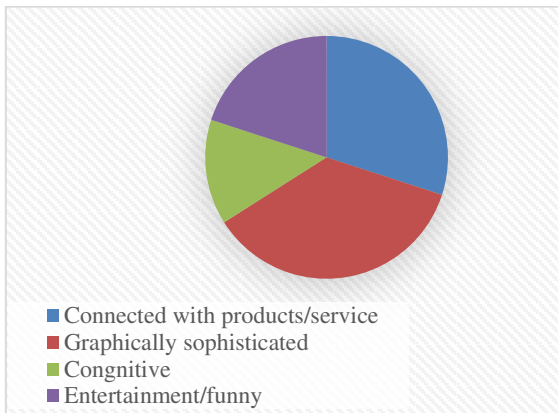
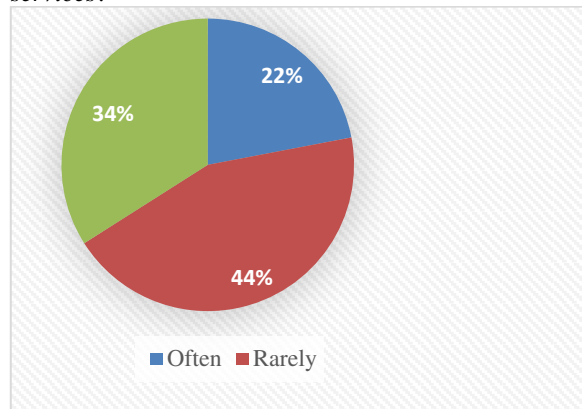


Figure no. 4: Do you express your opinion about advertising and service of the company's products / services?



Source: Authors' contribution

Social media users are ready to express their opinions about products or services and share advice with other consumers. If the posts and advertisements were interesting, the users should be read it.

Figure no. 5: Does it affect on you or how important is customer reviews when you are buying service or product?

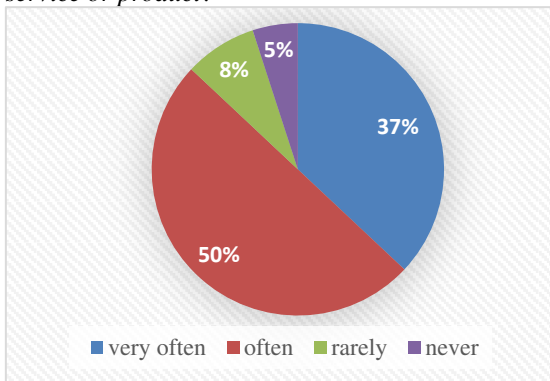
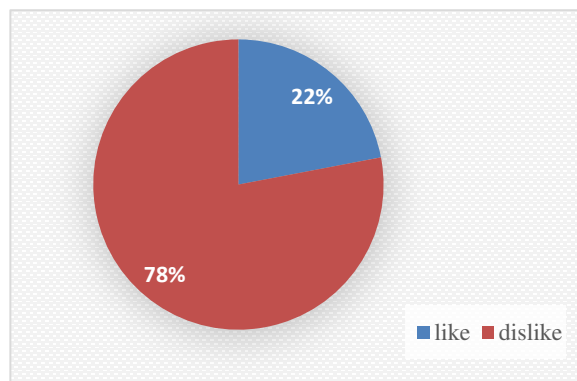
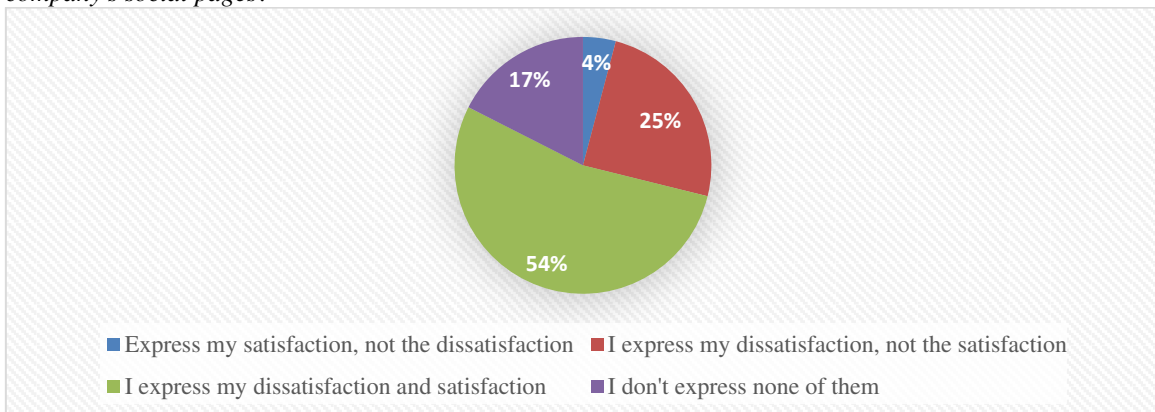


Figure no. 6: Do you like the activities carried out by Georgian companies on social networks?



Source: Authors' contribution

Figure no. 7: Do you express satisfaction / dissatisfaction with the purchase of products / services on the company's social pages?



Source: Authors' contribution

The survey shows that consumers are waiting more activity from companies. They are ready to express their opinions about products or services and share advice with other consumers. If the posts and advertisements were interesting, the users should be read it. 78% of respondents do not like the activities carried out by Georgian companies in social media and it's the reason of thinking.

5. Conclusion

Social media is a quick and effective way to increase the public opinion, awareness, loyalty and confidence. The number of social media outlets increases the number of Internet users in parallel. Nowadays, in Georgia, There are almost no Internet users, that do not use any kind of social media. In addition to the purpose of the news, social media is an opportunity to determine the dependence of different parts of society towards specific products or services.

In Georgia, like other developing countries, social media management did not develop properly. In addition, companies have misunderstood certain functions:

Invalid communication - Informal relationships in social media are avoided. It is important that the social media managers of the companies realize that social media has its own communication language, which is straightforward and friendly. In spite of its serious image, the company should try to use this language. Otherwise social media will not accept it.

Unqualified staff - Experts note that, most of the social media managers in Georgia are unqualified. Often, there are no staff in the company who are well aware of social media. This is understandable because the social media is quite new and fast developing. Unfortunately, there is no stimulation to increase this kind of staff.

Training courses deficit - At present, there are very few educational courses that teach future managers and marketers how to work effectively in social media. Often, people who want to work in this field have to find and educate themselves.

It should be easy to understand - Companies should not work only in the form of genius idea but also they should work for the simplest ways to do this idea.

The company should have a target audience – In social media there are a lot of different people. Any statement, which is very interesting and funny for anyone, maybe too boring for others. Therefore, social media manager should take into consideration a specific segment in planning the campaign.

Georgian tourism companies use social media mainly to enhance the image and to increase consciousness. Also, the main purpose of using social media by the company is to get more revenue. However, the main part of the content of the company's page should not be the posts that are constantly encouraging customers to buy products. In social media, the consumer makes decision itself, that's why, a small pressure is perceived as a big negative. Accordingly, the number of tourist companies is increasing. Therefore it is important to communicate with the customer through social media.

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