



Role of Social Media in Shaping Local Youth Tourists' Behaviour Across the Sri Lankan Tourism Industry

H. Shamini^{1*}

¹*Trincomalee Campus, Eastern University, Sri Lanka.*

Author's contribution

The sole author designed, analysed, interpreted and prepared the manuscript.

Article Information

DOI: 10.9734/AJESS/2020/v8i130211

Editor(s):

(1) Dr. Sara Marelli, Scientific Institute and University Hospital IRCCS San Raffaele Ville Turro, Italy.

Reviewers:

(1) R Praveen Sam , G. Pulla Reddy Engineering College (Autonomous), Kurnool, India.

(2) Ong Choon Hee , Universiti Teknoogi Malaysia, Malaysia.

Complete Peer review History: <http://www.sdiarticle4.com/review-history/56752>

Original Research Article

Received 01 March 2020

Accepted 06 May 2020

Published 28 May 2020

ABSTRACT

The integration of social networking and new technologies has changed the way of communication and information sharing among the people, especially of young people is a fact. As well as, the development of Social Media (SM) has conveyed important changes in the behavioural pattern of tourists. Therefore, it is very essential to understand this new influential trending among the youth tourists, in order to accelerate the tourists' arrival and contribute to the development of Sri Lanka tourism. Therefore, this research aims at providing an insight to the Tourism Industry in Sri Lanka with regards to how social media platforms influence youth tourists' behavior. A sample of 103 youth tourists' response attained through online. The data obtained from the online survey were analyzed with descriptive, reliability test, mean and regression analysis.

Results from the survey have identified that Social Media does influence in the youth tourists' behaviour. In detail, eWOM and Online reviews/comments significantly influence in the behavior of youth tourists. And also the study confirmed that in order to attract tourists to a destination mainly revolves in the ability to convey the information to create positive images in the mind of youth tourists via social media. Thereby this study has recommended many suggestions for the Tourism and authorities. Including tourist authority should make its social media pages more interesting, appealing, informative and interactive so the customers can enjoy their social media experiences and they could spread eWOM and online reviews. And also they need to focus on how to create a positive and satisfactory image to their social media users in many other ways.

*Corresponding author: Email: shamnew91@gmail.com;

Keywords: Social media platforms; eWOM; online reviews; comments; youth tourists' behavior.

1. INTRODUCTION

Sri Lanka is classified as one of the most popular tourist destinations in the South Asia region. In Sri Lanka, tourism is the third-largest export earner in the economy after remittances and textiles and garment [1]. Hitherto, the sector has not fully captured its true potential and thus has not acquired the expected benefits [1].

A key development for social media marketing occurred in this era, with everyone has started using Facebook (then Twitter and others) as a social media marketing content channel [2]. It is true that tourists increasingly rely on electronic Word Of Mouth (e-WOM) and reviews on sites like social media and digital platform. Especially it is common among youth tourists, as they are the first time travellers and highly depend on the perceived image when choosing a holiday destination. However, misconceptions like, youth tourists usually show a low level of spending power and have led to poor marketing strategies aimed towards this segment of local tourism [3]. Even youth tourists are considered a low-income group, today's youth tourists may become future tourists with a significant amount of spending power. Therefore, any investment done in youth tourism is also an investment done for the future [4]. This is the context and rationale for this Tourism industry-related research to explore more opportunities for the development of tourism.

In Sri Lanka, there are ample of resources and investment opportunities in addition to the basic features like beach, historical and cultural sites and wildlife that could significantly expand the tourism sector. However, the country is facing several challenges in developing the tourism industry [5]. Hence, there is a need for the Sri Lankan tourism industry to more focus on social media to create and enhance favourable local tourists' behaviour. And also Sri Lanka social media marketers can take advance of the findings and numerous practices from this research.

1.1 Problem Statement

Few challenges which had been faced by Sri Lanka tourism industry clearly shows its incompetence in tourism-related marketing activities. Those are; firstly, Sri Lanka tourism

industry marketing and communications activities have not been trend-conscious and dynamic in response to market requirements [1]. It shows poor adoption of global trend including social media marketing. Secondly, continuing to highlight the same attractions and events and fail to market to the lesser-known places on social media [1], indicates a lack of effort in enhancing tourist expectation and curiosity among tourists. Altogether it is clear that still there is advancement need regarding the social media marketing in Sri Lanka tourism industry.

Richards and Wilson mentioned that only a few researches are done on youth tourism and their behaviour by tourism marketers [6]. According to Stelzner's annual industry report, measuring the marketing effectiveness of social media is one of the most important questions marketers need to continue to investigate [7]. Nevertheless, very few studies have examined the effectiveness of social media in tourism [8]. The study related to tourism on social media is still in an early stage [9]. As per their statement, it is obvious that the research on social media and its effect of eWOM and reviews/comments on youth tourist's behaviour still needs to be expanded. Hence, this research attempts to fill the literature gap and further the knowledge of social media related to the tourism industry.

1.2 Research Objectives

1. Identify the type of social media platforms is used more frequently by the youth tourists in Sri Lanka.
2. Identify the impact of the predictor factors of social media on youth tourists' behaviour.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Social Media

Social media platforms are rapidly replacing traditional marketing channels as go-to conduits for achieving a variety of marketing objectives, from creating awareness to calling on consumers to buy [10]. Meanwhile, in 2006 it was argued that social media started replacing traditional sources of information [11]. And then, it has been enforced that social media might influence buyer behaviour [12]. It has also transformed tourism, for social media now play a vital role in the construction of the tourist gaze, destination

image, and travel decisions [13]. Facebook and Twitter were also found to be the two most useful social media channels in the tourism industry. Varkaris also in his research stated that Web 2.0 brings about a new type of traveller through social interactions online [14].

2.2 E-WOM

The electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) is defined as “all informal communications directed at consumers through Internet-based technology related to the usage or characteristics of particular goods and services, or their sellers” [15]. Over the years tourism has relied heavily on the power of word of mouth marketing; it used to be our friends and family who inspired and helped in planning our travels. However, today with the emergence of digital technologies, the word of mouth information has extended beyond a limited group to the entire world. Social Media as a part of the digital technology revolution now connects travellers to the opinions and recommendations of millions of people, including friends in their social network [16]. To examine it, the following hypothesis has been formulated.

H1: eWOM in social media has a significant impact on youth tourists' behaviour

2.3 Online Reviews/ Comments

Online reviews provide a trusted source of search information. And it is a way that the community members interact and contribute value in the form of content, reviews, and recommendations [17]. Zhu stated that online consumer reviews can be a good proxy which in turn, can have a strong influence on the decision-making processes of other potential customers [18]. A study of Anwasha portrayed that the tourism preferences of the young generation are affected by comments on Social Media and Social Media has both positive and negative effects on the tourism market. [16] Thus the following hypothesis has been formulated;

H2: Online reviews/ comments in social media has a significant impact on youth tourists behaviour.

2.4 Youth Tourists' Behaviour

Youth tourists are characterized as adventurous, technologically literate, experts in social media and information seekers [19]. One of the important aspects of young travellers is that they do not have a lot of direct experiences with many destinations. The formation of their perceived

image about a destination mostly guided by visual presentations based on information sources such as e-WOM and online reviews in social media [20]. Martin in his studies indicated that tourism products are mainly intangible thus the image is regarded as a vivid representative for the destination and believed to have strong influences on travellers' destination choice and decision-making [21]. Nevertheless, youths usually act as change agents by influencing sociality and culture through social media [22].

Behavioural intention describes factors that motivate someone to perform certain behaviour [23]. In this study, youth tourists' behaviour describes the willingness to use social media for tour organisation, and intention to recommend refers to the objective to advise others to use social networks when organising tours.

3. METHODOLOGY

Young tourists have been chosen for this study because of the growing significance of tourists among the youth. Respondents are local youth tourists, who are 18 to 32 age level. The age range for young tourists was in line with Gibson et al. [24]. The respondents had to use their Social Media channels, to spread the word about their tour write about their experiences, take pictures and videos to share on YouTube, Facebook, and Twitter. Respondents were screened via three questions at the beginning of the questionnaire; (1) What is your age? (2) Are you interested in tourism / visited tourist places in Sri Lanka? (3) Have you ever used social media for your tour in Sri Lanka? The Responses of respondents above 32 years old and do not use social media for the tour plan were excluded.

A structured questionnaire was used which employed with multiple-choice questions and Likert scale questions. Under the convenience sample”, There were 117 questionnaires answered however only 103 questionnaires eligible to use for further analysis. This sample size was considered adequate based on Cooper and Schindler, [25] proposition that statistically, for generalization to take place, a sample of at least 30 must exist. The data analysis for this research done by using the statistical package SPSS. The results were presented below.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The data presentation and analysis are presented with frequency distribution, mean, and

standard deviation and regression analysis with research variable to achieve the formulated research objective.

4.1 Sample Profile

Descriptive statistical analysis was run on respondents' demographic variables. The results are shown in Table 1.

Table 1 reflects the demographic characteristics of respondents. As per the gender, 56.3% of the respondents are male and the female respondents' percentage is 43.7%. while, regarding their age, it can be concluded that there 43.7% of respondents age distribution fall between 23 to 27. The sample is employed and educated one since 30.1% of the respondents work in the private sector and 26.5% being as students.

Regarding the question with whom the respondents would like to travel; most of the respondents prefer to visit with their respondents (36.9%) next to that around 25.2% would like to travel with their family.

Fig. 1 reveals that which tourist place respondents highly prefer to visit in Sri Lanka. Out of 103 most of the respondents (around 33%) would like to visit beaches in Sri Lanka. Next to that waterfall, it is around 26.21%. From this finding it is recommended to the tourist authority and marketers in future they could invest on beach and waterfall related tourism destination development to attract more youth tourists.

Next, respondents were asked to indicate the most popular social media platform they usually use to search tour related information. Altogether five social media platforms were given to the respondents for their consideration. As per the findings, it can be concluded that Facebook and youtube are the two most popular social media platform which is used by the youth tourists to search tour related information in Sri Lanka. It is aligned with the previous study also' Facebook was found to be the two most useful social media channels to promote the tourism industry [26].

Findings reveal that while creating strategies toward youth tourists' arrival, marketers should focus more on Facebook and youtube social media platforms to reach more target group in Sri Lanka.

4.2 Descriptive Statistics of Study Variables

The descriptive data including, reliability, mean, and standard deviation of the study variables were obtained and shown in following Table 2.

All selected factors were tested for reliability analysis. The Cronbach's Alpha coefficient value for all attributes above .7, which indicated strong internal consistency among the attributes. Therefore, the variables used in this study were concluded as reliable. Sekaran posits that the result of reliability tests below 0.60 is considered to be poor, whereas if it is greater than 0.60 it can be acceptable [27].

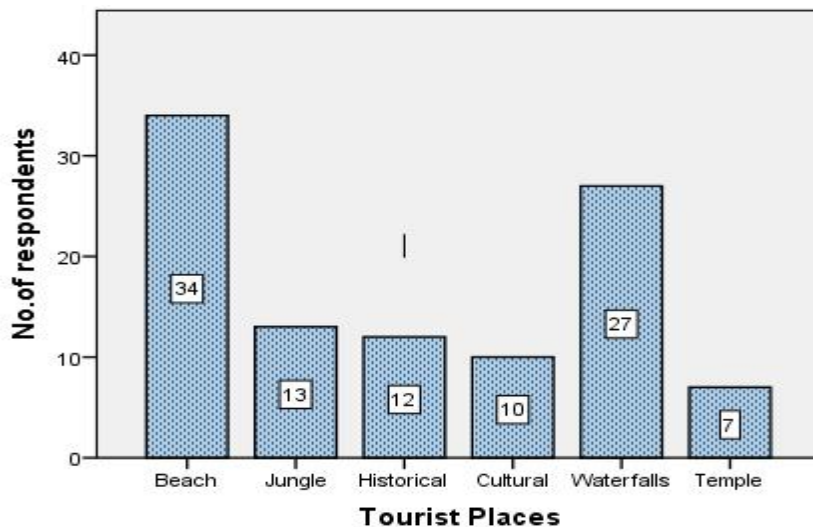


Fig. 1. Tourist Places

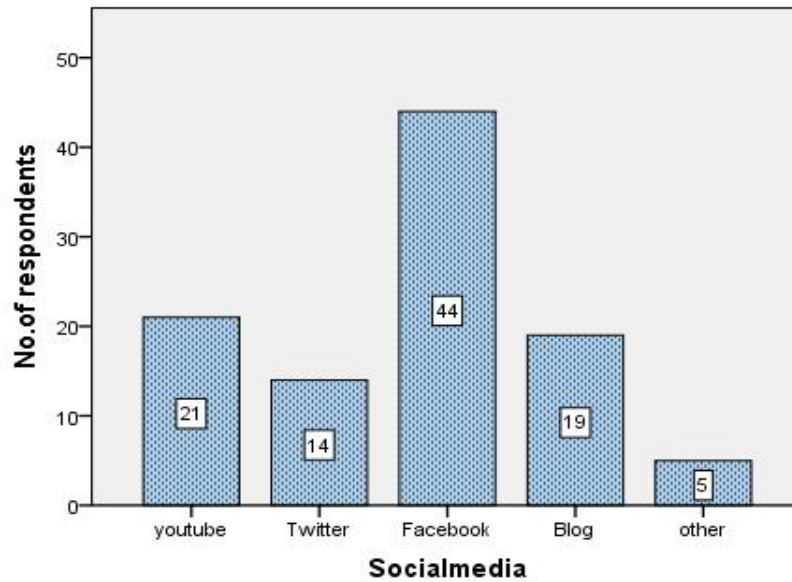


Fig. 2. Type of social media

Table 1. Summary of demographic information

Demographic profile		Frequencies	Percentages (%)
Gender	Female	45	43.7
	Male	58	56.3
Age groups	18-22	24	23.3
	23-27	45	43.7
	29-32	34	33
Employment	Private	31	30.1
	Freelancers	5	4.9
	Students	27	26.2
	Unemployed	21	20.4
	Public	19	18.4
With whom	Family	26	25.2
	Alone	14	13.6
	Partner	18	17.5
	Friends	38	36.9
	Others	7	6.8

Table 2. Reliability

Variable	No. of Statements	Cronbach's Alpha coefficient
eWOM	3	.814
Reviews	3	.714
Tourist Behaviour	4	.748

Table 3. Level of variables

Dimension	Mean	S.D	Decision attribute
eWOM	3.568	.857	High Level
Online Reviews/Comments.	3.061	.714	Moderate Level
Tourist Behaviour	3.770	.726	High Level

Table 4. Regression predicting tourists' behaviour with selected factors

Model	Coefficients ^a		t	Sig.
	Unstandardized coefficients			
	B	Std. Error		
1 (Constant)	.990	.266	3.719	.000
eWOM	.331	.088	2.975	.004
Reviews/Comments	.261	.105	3.137	.002

a. Dependent Variable: Tourists' Behaviour

According to the results, eWOM and Tourists behaviour found to be high level. It shows that youth tourists in Sri Lanka have a high level of attention toward these factors. At the same time, Online Reviews/Comments found to be moderate Level. To conclude, youth tourists in Sri Lanka have an only moderate level of attention regarding Online Reviews/Comments.

4.3 Regression Analysis

To achieve the second research objective, the hypotheses stated in the literature review were created to determine the impact of the predictor factors (eWOM and online reviews/comments) of social media on youth tourists' behaviour. Thus, a Multiple Linear Regression Analysis was performed between independent variables as; eWOM and online reviews/comments on the dependent variable, Tourist Behaviour. And the following results were obtained.

The coefficient of determination $R^2 = 0.569$, means that 56.9% of the variability of Tourist Behaviour is explained by the selected factors. Furthermore, the selected factors; eWOM and Online reviews/comments have significant influence ($p < 0.05$) on Tourist Behaviour. This indicates that the alternative hypotheses (H_1 , and H_2) are appropriate and can be accepted.

Analyzing the coefficients, the variables that present the highest relative contributions to impact Tourist Behaviour are eWOM, followed by online reviews/comments. This finding aligns with the findings of Dwivedi who has pointed out that consumers may trust fellow consumers more and "electronic word of mouth" has become important in today's society [28]. And also Litvin et al. investigated the influence of both positive and negative e-WOM in tourism products and confirmed the significant role that e-Word-of-Mouth has played as an information source in travel and tourism [15].

5. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATION

The main objectives of this study are to identify the type of social media platforms are used more frequently by the youth tourists and evaluate the impact of the predictor factors of social media on youth tourists' behaviour. The presented findings offer some preliminary evidence on the mechanisms of social media and local youth tourists' behaviour. Facebook and youtube are the two most popular social media platform which is used by the local youth tourists to search tour related information in Sri Lanka. Therefore, it is recommended that tourism marketers or managers may upload valuable tour information, including attractions found in the particular place (through pictures or videos) and its' direction on Facebook or YouTube so that they could easily reach the vast number of local youth tourists. For example, social media marketers can create a link Facebook or YouTube and inform the unique features of the destination and its' facilities surrounded.

An investigation on the coefficients of each factors eWOM and Online reviews/comments significant variable related to tourists behaviour. Therefore, it is evident that to promote the youth tourists arrival in Sri Lanka tourism-related strategy developers should concentrate on eWOM and Online reviews/comments in Social media. The previous studies also confirmed that around 68% of global respondents trusted consumer opinions posted online, 84% of respondents trusted electronic word-of-mouth recommendations from friends and family [29]. Thus, it is recommended that If Sri Lankan Tourism gives more focus on social media it will very helpful for growing this sector. Because when people search for a new travel destination they usually access the information through social media in the form of eWOM and Online reviews/comments. Because of social media websites, the tourists post their pictures and videos where they visited and post online

reviews of the place they were visited, it will be a major source for the followers. And also, tourist authority should focus on social media platform especially Facebook and YouTube to enhance the tourists' experience.

6. LIMITATION

Certain limitations were identified in this study with some suggestions for future studies; study sampling was convenience and did not cover foreign youth tourists. In future studies, it would be ideal to cover foreign tourists also to generalize the study.

COMPETING INTERESTS

Author has declared that no competing interests exist.

REFERENCES

1. Sri Lanka Tourism Strategic Plan 2017-2020, Sri Lanka Tourism Development Authority (SLTDA). Available: https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=1&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=2ahUKEwjM7big_srfAhWMf30KHQloBO0QFjAAegQIChAB&url=ht tp%3A%2F%2Fwww.slt da.gov.lk%2Fsri-lanka-tourism-strategic-plan-2017&usg=AOvVaw0yATFuul90Ut1grHEp598W
2. Cait Lambertson, Andrew T. Stephen, American Marketing Association, Journal of Marketing: AMA/MSI. 2016;80: 146–172. ISSN: 0022-2429 (print) Available: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1509/jm.15.0415>
3. Pantouvakis A. The relative importance of service features in explaining customer satisfaction: A comparison of measurement models. *Managing Service Quality*. 2010;20(4):366–387.
4. Reisinger Y, Mavondo F. Determinants of youth travel markets' perceptions of tourism destinations. *Tourism Analysis*. 2002;7(1):55-66.
5. Fernando S. Managing the post-war tourism development in Sri Lanka. *International Journal of Business and Social Science*. 2016;7(11):90-100.
6. Richards G, Wilson J. Today's Youth Travellers: Tomorrow's global Nomads: New horizons in independent youth and student travel. International Student Travel Confederation (ISTC); 2004.
7. Stelzner MA. Social media marketing industry report: How marketers are using social media to grow their businesses; 2011. Available: <http://www.socialmediaexaminer.com/SocialMediaMarketingReport2011.pdf>
8. Mabry E, Porter L. Movies and myspace: The effectiveness of official web sites versus online promotional contests. *Journal of Interactive Advertising*. 2010; 10(2):1-15.
9. Zeng B, Gerritsen R. What do we know about social media in tourism? A review. *Tourism Management Perspectives*. 2014; 10:27–36.
10. Batra, Rajeev, Kevin Lane Keller. Integrating Marketing Communications: New Findings, New Lessons, and New Ideas. *Journal of Marketing*. 2016;80(6): 122-45.
11. Jepsen A. Information search in virtual communities: Is it replacing use of off-line communication? *Journal of Marketing Communications*. 2006;12(4):247-261.
12. Constantinides E, Fountain S. Web 2.0: Conceptual foundations and marketing issues. *Journal of Direct, Data and Digital Marketing Practice*. 2008;9(3):231-244.
13. White L. Facebook, friends and photos: A snapshot into social networking for generating travel ideas In N. Sharda (Ed.), *Tourism informatics: Visual travel recommender systems, social communities, and user interface design*. Hershey, PA: IGI Global. 2010;115–129.
14. Varkaris E, Neuhofer B. The influence of social media on consumers hotel decision journey. *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Technology*, [Online]. 2017;8(1):101-118. Available: www.emeraldinsight.com [Accessed on 15th April 2018]
15. Litvin WS, Goldsmith ER, Pan B. Electronic word-of-mouth in hospitality and tourism management. *Tourism Management*. 2008;29(3):458–468.
16. Anwasha Mukherjee1, Manasa Nagabhusanam, Role of social media in tourism marketing. *International Journal of Science and Research (IJSR)*. 2016;5(6). ISSN (Online): 2319-7064
17. Nonnecke B, Andrews D, Preece J. Non-public and public online community participation: needs, attitudes and

- behavior. *Electronic Commerce Research*. 2006;6(1):7–20.
18. Zhu F, Zhang X. Impact of online consumer reviews on sales: the moderating role of product and consumer characteristics. *Journal of Marketing*. 2010; 74(2):133–148.
 19. Bizirgiannia I, Dionysopoulou P. The influence of tourist trends of youth tourism through social media (SM) & Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs). *Procedia – Social and Behavioral Sciences*. 2013;73:652–660.
 20. Stepchenkova S, Morrison A. Russia's destination image among American pleasure travelers: Revisiting Echtner and Ritchie. *Tourism Management*. 2008;29(3): 548-560.
 21. Martin H, Rodriguez BI. Exploring the cognitive-affective nature of destination image and the role of psychological factors in its formation. *Tourism Management*. 2008;29(2):263-277.
 22. Beerli A, Martin J. Tourist characteristics and the perceived image of tourist destinations: a quantitative analysis. A case study of Lanzarote, Spain. *Tourism Management*. 2004;25(5):623-636.
 23. Ashcraft MH. *Cognition*. Upper Saddle River: Pearson Education; 2006.
 24. Gibson HB, Qi CX, Zhang JJ. Destination image and intent to visit China and the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games. *Journal of Sport Management*. 2008;22:427–450.
 25. Cooper DR, Schindler PS. *Business research methods*. (8th ed.). Boston: 15 McGraw-Hill Irwin; 2003.
 26. Friebe K, Campbell D. *Social media in the hospitality and leisure industry*. DLA Piper; 2010.
Available:http://www.dlapiper.com/files/Publication/157721b8-d5ee-45ce-8911-11451f0738df/Presentation/PublicationAttachment/a9f81f84-7cbb-49c1-865d19c9283af4d3/DLA_Piper_UK_Social_Media_in_Hospitality_and_Leisure_Sector.pdf
 27. Sekaran U. *Research methods for business. A skill building approach*. New York: Wiley; 2003.
 28. Dwivedi M, Shibu TP, Venkatesh U. Social software practices on the internet: Implications for the hotel industry. *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*. 2007;19(5):415–426
 29. Nielsen. Nielsen: Earned Advertising Remains Most Credible Among Consumers; Trust in Owned Advertising on the Rise; 2013.
Available:<http://www.nielsen.com/us/en/press-room/2013/nielsen--earned-advertising-remains-most-credible-among-consumer.html>

© 2020 Shamini; This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0>), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

Peer-review history:
The peer review history for this paper can be accessed here:
<http://www.sdiarticle4.com/review-history/56752>