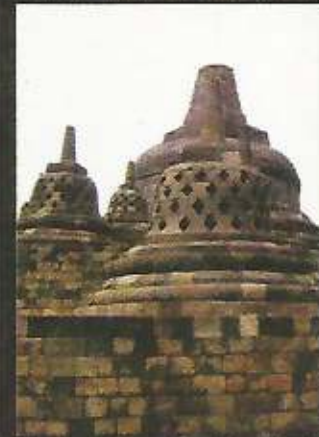


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TOURISM BEHAVIOR IN THE CYBER ERA

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Abstract

The presence of the internet offers a new color for tourism industry. A person who likes traveling often writes experience and stories of trips to the tourist places they have visited with pictures on their personal blog. Indirectly this be a means of free promotion for the number of tourist sites which nowadays called as e-Worth of Mouth Communications as a tool of viral marketing. The internet also allows any person connected and forming communities, including community who like traveling. They can plan travel together or mutual visit for travelling in their regions in turn. However, tourism promotion can't just rely on tourists personal testimony who written passing blog. Promotion through various media must remain committed using a smart planning. The change of consumer behavior during the internet era is followed by changes in creating tourism products and tourism marketing strategy.

Keywords: internet, tourism industry, promotion, viral marketing

Introduction

Universal McCANN (2008) in his report *Power to the people, social media tracker*, claims that there are currently in the world more than 346 millions of people reading blogs, 307 millions visiting friends' social networking sites, 248 millions sharing photos and 272 million users having a profile in a social networking site. Internet users in Indonesia reach 82 million in 2013 and continue to grow be 107 million in 2014 and 139 million or 50 % of the total population by 2015. The top five social networking usages are the Philippines, Indonesia, Malaysia, Brazil and Russia. This shows the growth of communication access. Human interaction runs faster and globally.

The development of internet affects the way humans interact being more intensive through the use of social media. Facebook and twitter is most popular social media followed by line, cafe4tune and chatting facilities, such as yahoo messenger, skype, googletalk, wechat and kakaotalk. Friendship site to matrimonial site flourish in the internet.

Along with the use of the internet massively, communication behavior change from face to face communication to mediated communication with the internet as a medium. People prefer to share and seek information via the internet. They can share stories, photos and videos through websites which are available and can be used for free through a personal blog. In the cyberspook era information search also become easier and fast. Internet provides more reliable and trustworthy sources of information.

Millions of information we need has been provided and can be obtained free anywhere, anytime and by anyone who had internet access.

Cyber era is also affecting tourism industry in terms of tourism behavior. Internet has supposed a complete revolution on consumer behaviors. Internet users are not anymore a passive character but a more interactive. One able to interact with other users sharing experiences, information, ideas via forums, social networks, chat rooms, video and photo sharing platforms and so on. They seek and share information about tourism objects, as well as transportation and accommodation facilities available at tourist sites over the internet, using either a personal blog or social media. Besides travelling stories and impressions they got during the trip also furnished with pictures of interesting tourist sites and facilities that are available in the surroundings, such as hotels, restaurants and souvenirs of the area. Thus a great change has happened and which the new generations of tourists have to overcome, adapt and take advantage of it. Travel Manager or travel agency offering interesting tour packages through an interactive website so that the tourists can get information quickly, clear, complete and accurate.

Recently, sites and communities can be found in the social media which gather travelling lovers. In Indonesia, for example, is indobackpacker, backpacker Indonesia, Muslim Holiday, Muslimah backpacker. This community is where the backpackers, travelling lovers, adventurous, and connoisseur nature of various regions in Indonesia share information, stories and discussion about backpacking and traveling and looking for a friend to do a tour together. While for international scope is Hospitality Club that is a network where member *who* want to visit places of the intended recipients can stay in friend's places who are members on the site. Idea of the establishment of Muslimah backpacker is the same as Hospitality Club. Its members are Indonesia women spread across the world and not necessarily Muslim. They also often perform social service activities around tourist sites as a means of interaction between members.

Indirectly the existence of the site and the community help tourism marketing. The habit of present people to share information via the internet is in accordance with prospective tourist information search behavior that relies on internet. Considering all aspects of human life in the cyber era affected by the internet then the tourism industry can't off also from internet influence. Tourism marketing can be done without charge with a stronger effect and reach a wider audience in a fast time.

Consumer Behavior in Tourism

Consumer behavior focuses on individuals making decisions about the use of their available resources (time, money and effort) in the purchase of goods and services related to consumption (Schiffman and Kanuk 2005). Solomon *et al.* (2007:7) defined consumer behavior as the "processes involved when individuals or groups select, purchase, use or dispose of products, services, ideas or experiences to satisfy needs and desires". Salomon identifies the existence of a process, process which normally implies a sequence of stages by which a consumer has to overcome to purchase a good or service. This process goes from the recognition of a need or problem until the outcome of the purchase; it is known as the decision-making process (Swarbrooke and Horner 2007).

Engell, Kollat and Blackwell (1968 cited Williams 2002) presented their last version of their comprehensive model on the decision-making process in 1978. They produced one of the most important texts in the field of Consumer behavior creating a model designed to study the purchase of high risk items, as it is the case of tourism (Williams, 2002).

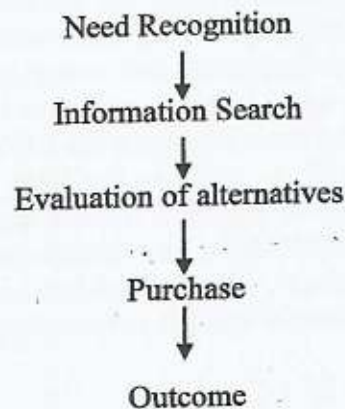


Figure 1.1 Model of Consumer decision making
Source: Engell, Kollat and Blackwell (1968) in Williams (2002)

Stage one: Need recognition

In this very first stage the consumer realizes, influenced by internal or external factors of himself that he needs to fulfil a need which has suddenly appeared.

Stage two: Information search

In this second phase, the consumer starts looking for information about his purchase decisions. Depending on the level of routine that this act suppose, he will spend more or less time in this phase. And as Blackwell *et al* (2006: 75) points out, the consumer will be influenced by two types of sources: "marketer dominated" and "non marketer-dominated". The former one refers to all the information produced by marketers in order to inform or persuade consumers; and the last one refers to friends, family and the media. As Engel *et al* (1992 cited Oorni 2004) claimed consumers usually rely on both types of information; it is very rare that consumers just rely in one source. And as Berelson and Steiner (1964 cited Oorni 2004) pointed out, all information sources are usually complements instead of competitors.

Stage three: Evaluation of alternatives

Once all the information has been collected, the consumer has to evaluate all the alternatives which have appeared in the previous stage. In this phase consumer is going to be influenced by his attitudes, values and motivation among other factors. He has to select, evaluate the gains and losses of the different alternatives.

Stage four and five: Purchase and Outcome

After having evaluated the possible alternatives a decision have to be taken. Afterwards the consumer will sense a feeling of satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the outcomes, and thus, depending on his level of satisfaction his next purchase will be influenced in a positive or negative way. The experience of a purchase may modify the behavior of future purchases.

Mathieson and Wall (1982), cited in Cooper and Gilbert (2008) created a model based in the classical models of consumer making process proposing a five stage model over a framework of four interrelated factors: tourist profile, travel awareness, destination resources and characteristics and trip features. However, the model has been criticised for taking a product based perspective instead in a consumer based perspective. In figure number 1.2. it is possible to appreciate the five stages process that Mathieson and Wall (1982) proposed for the tourism product.

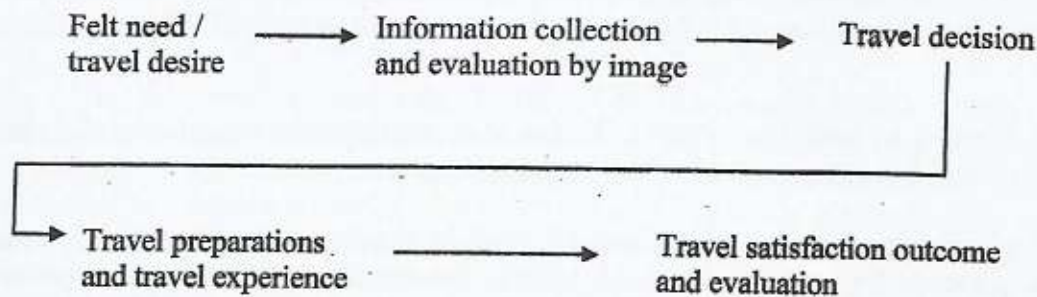


Figure 1.2 Travel buying behaviour

Source: Mathieson and Wall (1982) in: Cooper (2005)

The tourism industry is not selling simple products, but experiences. Experiences which are very depending on emotions, feelings, perceptions and even, on psychographic, demographic and sociological factors stocked on unique individuals. As consequence, tourists, as human beings they are, need to express their experiences and own feelings to third people; might be face to face or via Internet and Social Media. In addition, as consumer's experiences they are, people tend to trust more on them; on experiences lived by other consumers instead of the information produced by the owners of businesses. A recent study published by Gretzel and Yoo (2008) has shown that "reviews play an important role in the trip planning process for those who actively read them. They provide ideas, make decisions easier, add fun to the planning process and increase confidence by reducing risk making it easier to image what places will be like". Thereafter all the platforms where tourists can express themselves, they will be used by other tourists to gather for information from in order to take ideas, reduce the complexity of decisions and make the process less tedious.

Information communication technologies (ICT's) and the internet play important and specific roles in each of the stage of decision making process. There are hundreds of platforms where internet users can interact and share information with other users, starting from blogs, forums, video and photo sharing to social networks, virtual communities, and chat rooms.

Information upload by users which called "User Created Content" (UCC) and social media platforms form a new and more interactive source of information, essential and of highlight importance to the tourism sector which as Sheldon (1997) pointed out tourism is information intense industry due to the tourism product features. In addition, it is also interesting to analyze UCC and its platforms because users will give more value to user generated content than to professional content as it may be more personalized on the demand side where users have the power. In addition non marketed information might be seen as more credible information (Mill & Morrison, 2002).

Tourism Product

The tourism product is not a simple item, good or service of consumption; the tourism product is "a bundle of activities, services and benefits that constitute experiences" (Medlick and Middleton 1973 cited Carmichael 2005 :185). It constitutes a mix of the characteristics of the services and the singular features of the tourism industry, what really differentiate the product from any physical good (Yilmaz and Bitizti, 2005).

According to Middleton (2001); Kotler *et al.* (2005) it is agreed that the main characteristics of the tourism product are the followings:

Intangibility: Services cannot be seen, smelled or even touched, what means that they cannot be perceived from the senses. The tourist product cannot be proved before consuming; this is one of the facts which make of tourism a high risk activity

Heterogeneity: Services are offered by people, what means that it is not possible to obtain two products alike

Perishability: The product which is not consumed when it is offered, it is considered lost as long as there is no possible stock

Inseparability: The tourist product is produced and consumed at the very same time, in a simultaneous way

Seasonality: demand is highly fluctuating among the seasons of the year

High fix costs of operations: the basic infrastructures for the tourism activity suppose great fix costs. (E.g. buildings and transport infrastructures)

Interdependence: Tourists consume not just a single product or service but a bunch of services and products combinations, thus all of them are interdependent.

Due to all the particularities and unique characteristics of the tourism product, tourists develop a special behavior in their decision making process. Seaton and Bennett (1999) said that tourism encompasses a great risk and involvement to consumers. Thereafter it is possible to appreciate the immense relevance that the choice of a tourism product have upon consumers. In addition, and as seen in Seaton (1994) tourism involves the expenditure of a large amount of money in a product which cannot be tested. And as Seaton (1994 cited Seaton & Bennett 1998: 25) stated: "the opportunity cost of a failed holiday is irreversible". Therefore the importance of a good choice is of great importance.

Poon (1994) believes that tourists are the products of changing population demographics and are more experienced, flexible and independent-minded. Tourists

have changed values and lifestyles, which affects tourist demand. Given this fact, it is found that many tourism-reliant countries have developed various tourism products such as spas, natural-based resorts, and eco-tourism destinations in order to supply the changing tourism demands. In this case, Thailand can be taken as an example. It is found that as a result of a current tourism trend in health-concerned tourism, Thailand has developed many spas and health-based tourism sites to supply the tourists' demands (Circle of Asia, 2003). This shows an important role of tourist consumer behavior in developing tourism products. It is possible to say here that understanding tourist consumer behavior is very beneficial for developing tourism products in order to supply the tourism demand.

Tourism Marketing

Swarbrooke and Horner (2007: 3) stated, "Consumer behavior is the key to the underpinning of all marketing activity which is carried out to develop, promote and sell tourism products". Understanding the tourist behavior is the base to develop a successful marketing strategy.

In the term of marketing, Sciffman dan Lazarkanuk (1994 : 283) define communication as the unique tool that marketers use to persuade consumers to act in desire way. In transaction marketing including sales is a central component. In the field of marketing communication a new trend toward integrating communication elements such as advertising, personal selling, sales promotion, public relations and direct marketing into two way integrated marketing communication perspectives has emerged in North America during the 1990's. (Gronroos, 2004: 102). Lupiyoadi (2001:108) adds one more tool of marketing communications namely word of mouth.

In order to define it in a more academic way, Litvin *et al.* (2008 p.461) defined eWOM communications 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". From the definition it is possible to appreciate the existence of interpersonal relationships which are not necessarily pushed by marketers. Informal communications can be pushed by consumers promoting a peer to peer communication, which as Gruen *et al.* (2006) pointed out it is produced in order to exchange a specific know-how among consumers and which can be used as an information source enhancing competence and knowledge.

Reichheld and Sasser (1990 cited in Derbaix *et al.* 2003) claimed that WOM has a great potential in marketing as it reduces expenses and it can to increase revenues if customers are engaged. These revenue generating strategies might be focus in consumers and customer relationships, the most satisfied and engaged online a customer is, the most positive eWOM will produce and better image will have the company with less money invested in marketing. For instances, revenue generating strategies might be carried out through a viral or a social media marketing strategy.

Viral marketing and Social Media Marketing (SMM) might be perceived as similar; however they have to be distinguished. According to Wilson (2000:1) viral marketing refers to "any strategy that encourages individuals to pass on a marketing message to others, creating the potential for exponential growth in the message's

exposure and influence". It is based upon the idea of rapid spread of viruses which in the field of online communications it is translated to the "buzz" created by eWOM. Besides, SMM is a new type of marketing which aim to achieve its objectives trough the participation in social media platforms by means of unique, attractive and useful content. Those contents go from simple articles in blogs to a video on YouTube. The main difference lies in the fact that SMM is focused on the raise of a brand visibility and Viral marketing in the spread of the word.

Regarding the change in tourism consumer behavior in this internet era it happens also to changes in the marketing strategy for tourism. The use and selection of the right media will be able to reach proper audience widely at low cost. Thus need strategy selection for efficient and effective marketing media in accordance with the purpose of marketing. Meanwhile, the marketing strategy must also consider the characteristics of the different types of tourism products.

Conclusion

Presence the internet technology has changed tourism consumer behavior by more reliant on the internet to connect and share information about tourism places and its activity. Tourism products follow the new trends of tourism consumer behavior and need. Tourism marketing strategy was abreast of technology developments and the change of consumer behavior which promote tourism products through integrated marketing communications, in where, currently using viral marketing and SMM. Nevertheless the use of all promotion mixed components cannot be abandoned. It needed the right selection tailored to the characteristics of the product, consumer, expected marketing objectives and availability of funds as well as the ability of marketing personnel.

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