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A STUDY ON "EFFECTIVE HANDLING OF SOCIAL MEDIA FOR BRANDING OF HOTELS"

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Abstract

In today's tech savvy world where people trust more on the user generated content on the internet, it becomes necessary for organizations to establish themselves in the virtual world as well. Not only one needs to show online presence but also requires maintaining their reputation to retain their customer base. Social media platforms play an important role in establishing brand image virtually. According to the article "Digital 2020: Global Digital Overview" Worldwide, there are 3.80 billion social media users in January 2020, with this number increasing by more than 9 percent (321 million new users) since this time last year. With the increasing number of users social media platform is useful for establishing brand and maintaining it as well. The study focuses on the use of social media by hotels. It will include their current handling strategies and various ways in which social media could be used for building brand with reference to hotels.

Introduction

A brand is a name, term, design, symbol, or any other feature that identifies one seller's good or service as distinct from those of other sellers" (American Marketing Association).Branding is the process of creating an image of the organization and its products in the minds of the customer. It also emphasizes on the quality and service provided by the organization which makes it stand out from others. This process is basically carried out for retention of customers.

Social media is online platform with various communication channels for sharing of information between people. Organizations have started to utilize social media for the benefit of their brand. It has helped to increase brand awareness and keep customers engaged with the brand by posting relevant content. Social media as a means to promote brand awareness and gain consumer attention has its own positive and negative effects. Aadvertising on Social media is sometimes viewed as an unwanted, and companies have to keep track of consumer responses to their advertisements to understand the value brand-related content.

Literature Review

"Digital 2020: Global Digital Overview" By Simon Kemp. This article is the summary of the research carried out by Global WebIndex, Statista, GSMA Intelligence, App Annie, Similar Web and Locowise for We Are Social and Hootsuite with DataReportal. According to the research the number of people around the world using the internet has grown to 4.54 billion, an increase of 7 percent (298 million new users) compared to January 2019. Most of the people spend their time on social media platform. Facebook is the most used social media platform around the world with around 1.97 billion audience. Youtube is the second most used platform followed by whatapp. The survey reports that Indians spend an average of 2 hours and 24 minutes per person, per day using social media which is also the average worldwide.

"Role of Social Media in Brand Building" by Emily Pribanic. In this article the author talks about Social media being essential for companies to build their brand, its important role for brands. According to the author it helps companies build connection with the audience for brand and he advises the use of social media as it helps in building brand by creating a platform for the customers to put forth their views.

"The Value of Social Media in the Hospitality Industry" By Jordan Jones, Social Media Manager of Stonebridge Companies. The article talks that even if the hotels believe in the word of mouth publicity it is necessary for them to be active on social media. The author makes a point that it is important that the industry

focuses on the impact of social media as most of the travelers use social media to express pleasure or frustration about their experiences.

"The Effects of Social media networks in the hospitality industry" By Wendy Lim. The research talks the use social media platforms in hospitality industry. Talking about hotels the researcher said that to stay competitive in the digital world, the hotel need to be involved with their intended audience by participating in online discussions, hospitality forums, podcasts, RSS feeds, and hotel review commentary while increasing awareness and building relationships with both new and loyal customers. The researcher shares strategies on using of social media platforms along with few real life examples.

"Social Media a Promotional Tool: Hotel Industry" By Manish Verma. This research paper focuses on use of social media by business hotels in NCR and customers perspective in context to usage and advantages of social media. The results of the research showed major reasons hotels use social media is to build image and to promote their hotels. Even if social media directly does not benefit in monetary terms it helped hotels to understand customer preference, create brand awareness and also attract people from other regions. The research does state that social media does help in brand building. (Lim, 2010) (Verma, 2018)

"Social Media Strategy for Hotels: Why These Brands Rise above the Rest" By Social tables. This online article talks about various international chain hotels that are doing well with social media marketing. These chains have understood to share the content suitable for particular social media platform rather than sharing same content on all the accounts. The article shares the strategies used by these chain hotels.

"How Starwood Hotels Made $2m From A Facebook Page" by Matthew. This case study talks about Starwood hotels using social media platforms to increase their business. The article talks about various strategies adopted by the brand to pull more clientele on social media platforms.

"The influence of social media on the consumers' hotel decision journey" by Barbara Neuhofer. This research paper talks about the use and influence of social media on consumer's hotel decision-making. With the increasing use of social media platform the changes that took place and are taking place is explained in this research paper.

"Hotels need to pay better attention to social media to drive revenue" by Alicia Hoisington. This article talks about the importance about using social media for generating revenue. The article encourages hoteliers to get involved in the brand conversations that go online. This will not only help them in increasing their customer base but will give first-hand information of customer expectation for helping the brand to grow.

"Hotel Reputation Management" By Customer Alliance this article talks about Hotel reputation management is the practice of monitoring and influencing how your property is perceived throughout the web.

Panel Discussion on "Start-Up pe charcha" was held in MSIHMCT on 31st January 2020.
The panelists were the young alumni of Institute itself, who spoke about the challenges they faced by them. They also discussed importance of social media marketing in today's time. The fact that young generation is more active on the social media platforms and it becomes easier to tap this market. Ms. Mariya Kagalwala of Chocollicious said that posting bakery items on her Instagram account helped her in her business, owing to the instant reviews and her clients' post about the product on her page. She also gets her major orders through social media platforms. She posts everyday a bakery item to engage her followers and retain them. Mr. Abhijeet Titkare owner of Fizzlebuzz Foods admitted that asking food bloggers to try out his products did help in his business. Dry Food Powder Products being new concept in India this idea did help him to show how to use the product and reach large crowd.

Significance of Study
Social media platforms connect people across the globe. It is a cheapest way to market the company products and create brand awareness. But with the ease of using social media comes a disadvantage. The negative comments

can spread out more faster than positive reviews. This research will help the budding and existing entrepreneurs or hoteliers to make use of social media to its optimal level and few suggestions on making social media page useful for branding.

Objectives of Study
To present the study related to the Hotel industry in the Pune, researcher will have following objectives:
1. To study handling of social media for branding of Hotels.
2. To identify the effective social media platform for branding of hotel.

Scope of the Study
1. The research is extended to Residents in Pune.
2. The Guest and hotel survey was conducted in the month of March – April 2020
3. The study is devoted to understand handling of social media.
4. It is been concentrating on branding of a hotel using social media.

Limitations of Study
1. Secondary sources of data are usually of limited worth for research purpose because of the error incompleteness in basic data. The data which is shared by the researcher may or may not be reliable.
2. The study is based on the responses received from the customers.
3. The Data is collected at a single point in time; it is difficult to measure changes in the population unless two or more surveys are done at different points in time.

Research Methodology
Applied research aims at finding a solution for an immediate problem facing a society or an industrial/business organization. Research aimed at certain conclusions facing a concrete social or business problem is an example of applied research.

The research is applied because it provides solutions to the problems of poor use of Social media for branding. It will be based on exhaustive data analysis collected from both, primary and secondary sources.

Sources of data
Primary data
The research is based on primary data; Survey of a Customer preferences. It also includes the information provided by Sample Hotels through questionnaire. The data is also collected during the panel discussions organized by the college. Some of the data is collected visiting the social media handles of the hotels.

Secondary Data
Secondary data has been collected from research papers published online and web-sites. Various articles published in online magazines are also reviewed.

Methods of data Analysis
Collected data is classified, tabulated and arranged in order of objectives. Simple statistical techniques such as ratios and percentages is been used to analyze the data and arrive at inferences. The results of this study can be considered transferable to a wider population of technology-savvy users, who use social media in their daily life and their hotel information search.
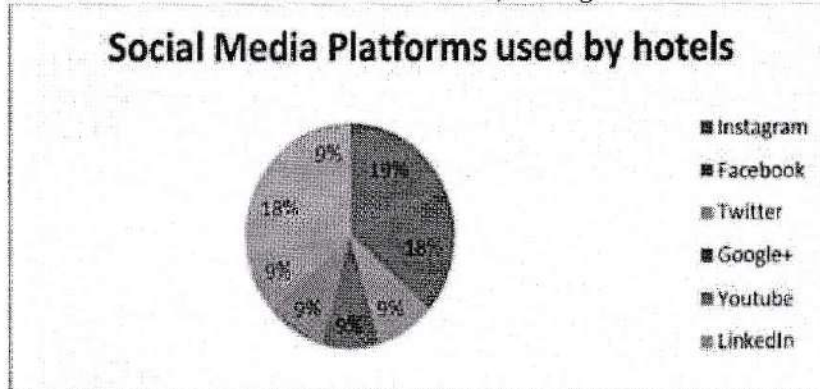
Data Analysis
The hotels for the study were surveyed in Pune city.

Questionnaire for hotels:

1. **Which Social Media Platforms, the organization**

Social Media Platforms used by hotels

- Instagram
- Facebook
- Twitter
- Google+
- Youtube
- LinkedIn

The hotels majorly use Facebook, Instagram and Whatsapp platform.

2. **Which is the most used Social Media platform by your organization?**
   The Hotels use Instagram accounts frequently.
3. **According to you which is the most effective social Media Platform? Why?**
   The Hotels believe Instagram helps to reach the target audience.
4. **What Type of content is posted on Social Media generally?**
   The Hotels use Social Media Platform to post about the new products, Discounts and   offers to attract the guest to their hotel. Other than that they also post what their hotel is all about.
5. **Is there software used by hotel to identify fake accounts and handle Social Media account?**
   Where reviews play an important role in the age of Social Media there is no software used by the hotels to identify fake reviews.

Responses from the guest

Total no. of responses: **32**

In order to be a sample the individual have to fit into the following criteria:

a) Need to have travelled during the last two years.
b) Have stayed in a hotel during their trip.
c) Be active users of social media.
d) Have used social media for travel related decision-making purposes.
f) They should be residents of Pune.

1. **Which Social Media Platforms do you use?**

Social Media Platforms	Platforms used by Guests
Instagram	20
Facebook	28
Twitter	5
Google+	15
YouTube	24
LinkedIn	9
Whatsapp	31
Email	33

The respondents are present almost on all social media platform. Email and whatsapp have more number of accounts as compared to the rest. Facebook is the 3rd highest followed by youtube and Instagram accounts.

2. Which the most used Social Media platform do you use?

Whatsapp is the most frequently used platform among the respondents followed by Instagram and then Facebook. We can see the respondents spend most of their time using these three social media platform as compared to others.

3. Do you visit the hotel's social media account before booking a room?

Around 63% respondents most of the times visited hotels Social Media page to get information about the hotel which may not be available on various websites. For example, Very few hotels post about various offers or special occasions on their website or they may not be visible at first glance which are generally posted on Social Media by them.

Social Media does affect the decision making of respondents on whether to book a hotel or not. If it does not help them in booking the hotel but definitely helps them to decide not to book the specific hotel.

Instagram & Facebook account posts of well-known hotels.

Most of the Hotels post something every day or alternate days. They generally post about mouthwatering food with captions, various photos of F&B outlets of the hotel, photos of celebrities visiting the hotel and also about Spa. They also share some posts related to employee appreciation or any awards won by the hotel. Most of the hotels for promoting their banquets can be seen posting about wedding ceremonies taking place in their hotel but very few in numbers. Wishing their followers on special occasions is never missed by these hotels. To show their support against fighting coronavirus most of the hotels in Pune have closed down their doors and using hotel room lights made shapes like heart, smiles to honor people risking their lives to save others. In these times to ensure their guest at home they also provide home delivery through various apps.

Findings and Suggestion
Findings

1. This study shows that the guests used the following accounts the most: Whatsapp, Facebook and Instagram, Whatsapp being the preferred one among the others. It was also found that Social Media does affect the decision making of respondents on whether to book a hotel or not.

2. When asked for suggestions from guest for social media posts most of them suggested that information needs to be related to offers and discount, exact room photos, sharing particulars like special menu in the restaurants, public programs in hotels and most importantly sharing their guest feedbacks. A corporate guest also requested to post something about the specific facilities for such clients.

3. As per the analysis, Instagram is the frequently used social media platforms by hotels. Hotels post something every day or alternate day on their social media handles majorly about food items. There were rare posts about the hotel, loyalty programs or offers offered by the hotel. One can hardly spot guest's reviews on hotels social media page stating about the stay or any photos with them.

4. For handling upset clients on social media the hotels generally respond as soon as possible and offer them solutions for their problems with a request to revisit the hotel. And regarding the fake reviews, there is no such strategy shared by the hotels to identify fake reviews. There is no software used by hotel to identify the fake reviews.

5. Only few hotels had computer generated feedback when contacted through Facebook and none actually returned. Thus highlighting the poor use of social media.

6. The hotels believed in keeping their social media handles genuine and simple and posting original pictures to maintain the reputation of the hotel. They also believed in encouraging Guest feedback to help boost business. One of the hotel also shared they do invite Bloggers for promoting the hotel.

Suggestions

- The independent hotels aspiring to make themselves a well-known brand need to tap the potential of social media in today's tech savvy world, as social media acts as a catalyst in creating a brand by reaching millions of customer within short span of time with minimum expenditure.

- Social Media handles of the hotel need to have uniformity across all platforms with regards to the logo, hotel bio, etc. for customer to recognize it easily. (Jenn, C)
- It is pertinent to design schedule for posting and follow it to keep up with the customers without overdoing it. Also developing a social media guide similar to an employee guide will be beneficial and should include details like brand character, company catchphrases, brand traits and vocabulary. Example the term hotel uses to address its customers could be either client or customers. It should be specified which word to use to maintain consistency. (Jenn, C)
- It is important to highlight Uniqueness of hotel in the profile and mention its distinguished features. For example, if the hotel allows pet, it should mention it to attract pet owners. Hotels can share information related to local campaigns & events on social media to create awareness about the same and attract interested customers.(Hart, K)
- To strengthen the social media presence, hotels can encourage customers to post about their stay experience which in turn will attract new customers. Customers may not be aware of hotels loyalty program and its benefit. Sharing content related to loyalty program may be helpful in increasing loyal members for the brand.
- Facebook and Instagram being frequently used accounts; hotels can focus on using these platforms for sharing information related to brand. Hotels can create a page for its guests to use it for sharing their Instagram-worthy personal experiences at its properties.
- Social media branding comes along with its own challenges. It is necessary to keep track on the online responses and be quick to answer as one negative may hamper the whole brand image to some extent. There is online reputation management software available which helps in tracking the brand related communication on web, manage reviews and also find brand position in virtual market.

Conclusion

A brand is more than a logo or profile it is about making customer's feel comfortable and approachable towards an organisation. To establish as a brand one needs to deliver quality service and product consistently. The organizations need to deliver their promises to win the trust of the customers which will be crucial in the branding process. Branding process is a strategyic approach for defining organisation's position in the market and deciding on steps to accomplish it's visions.

Social media is a platform that helps to interact with people across the boundaries. It helps people to build connections and share information with one another. With millions of users, social media has become an engagement, staffing, retention, and branding tool. Social media enables engagement with larger audience at the same time has made it preferred option for organizations to market their product.

Majority of the brands are using social media to the fullest for maintaining and communicating their brand to the customers. The hotel industry in India may not be using social media to its fullest potential. The hotel industry in developed countries has understood the true potential of social media in branding in today's world and is making the most of it. This research provides insight for hotels in Pune to make maximum use of social media. It is also helpful for budding hoteliers to understand the usage of social media to their advantage. Furthermore suggestions could be provided to enhance the use of social media for branding. With the technological advancements and new social networking sites coming up a study of how useful these sites can be for branding along with new strategies can be carried out.

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