

ASSESSMENT OF SOCIAL MEDIA AND ITS INFLUENCE ON HOSPITALITY INDUSTRY

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ABSTRACT

This paper seeks to explore the influence that social media has on the choices that consumers make with regards to decisions of the place that they would like to visit, savour food as well as helps generate revenue and build a brand image. Social media plays a major role in bringing numbers to the hospitality industry. It has made building relationships easier and marketing easier at much lesser cost than it was a half a decade before. The awareness and visibility that an organisation has today is widely due to the marketing, either directly or indirectly by social media platforms. Furthermore, attractive food and locale posts help create a factor which enables viewers to visit as well as upload their content which brings in more awareness, which was the outcome of this exploratory research. The result would be significant to hotel and restaurant owners as well as consumers who rely on social media while making a food choice.

Keywords: Social media, viral food, branding, bloggers, customers and hospitality

Introduction

Hospitality does not stop at hotels and restaurants; it has rather grown vast. It now includes tourism, IT sectors, Malls, Hospitals and more. With the boom in industry comes the challenge and competition. A race rather, a race to sustain and rise above the other. How do they do that, you ask? They market. Now the world does not have enough billboards to cover them all nor do the newspaper have enough space. It is the social media and the tech savvy generation that has taken over. 25 years back, painting of walls of houses and streets, flyers were pasted on public and private properties were in focus.

A decade ago, brands started to advertise their properties in newspapers and televisions. Tajness is one such video ad which was made by Taj group of hotels. Another popular mode of marketing was via pamphlets which is a practice still used. Previously pamphlets were distributed inside newspapers, magazines and another mode which is still practised today is, things have changed and dynamics as well, the way of marketing and the way consumers attract to a product are different too. Today, it is all about aesthetics, picturesque locations, trending items and Instagram-able life.

Today it barely takes hundred rupees to make a flyer and post it online. You can run ads and target your audience. The entire process at the most takes 6 hours and reaches as many as

millions. That is the awareness and visibility today's social media give.

Along with marketing, the audience is also interested to know who has visited the properties, who have posted pictures of it, who ate what. They look forward to seeing everything that has happened online with the brand or property. Every movement related to the property is closely observed and if it looks promising, the deal is then and there turned concrete.

Objectives

- To learn social media's role in the hospitality industry.
- To analyse effective ways of marketing.
- To understand how it is different than other modes of marketing.
- To know the impact of social media on the audience.

Significance of Study

- This study will help you understand how a little more attention towards building social presence on Internet can bring more value and money to the hospitality industry.
- It will help to analyse different social media strategies that will prove to be a blessing for hotels and restaurants to get more rev. and money wise

Literature Review

(Gururaja, 2015) stated that the will to try a new place, food item or restaurant becomes more concrete after viewing the pictures posted on social media and that more than 1/4th of the online world population depends on social media to find eateries and hotels to cater to their needs.

(Lim, 2010) in his thesis mentioned that social media is here to stay, and it has the potential to highlight a business and achieve financial benefits. A dedicated team to handle social media is needed to communicate with potential customers and the organisation.

(Healy & Wilson, n.d.) This article reflects on the hotel reservations received with relation to the social media engagement that the hotel guest have undertaken. With the help of data mining, it ascertains the pre and post reservations made.

(Kushwaha & Sainy, 2018) states that digital media has taken over all businesses and industries, including the hospitality industry. Hotels not only engage with their guests via social media, but also aim at creating a brand for themselves.

(Seth, 2012) this article takes into consideration the consumer's perspective of the various channels of social media that have created an impact on the purchasing choices and brand imprint for an organisation.

Aswani & Gugloth (2017) states that the hotel sector in India has been rapidly growing over the years, alongside, social media has also been actively used by the service sector as a communication tool in India. In a country that has nearly 200 million active social media users, the growth of travel and tourism among the younger generation.

Scope of the Study

This research focuses on how impactful and sustainable social media marketing is and how a strong social media presence of a brand is the need of the hour for the hospitality industry.

Limitations of Study

This study focuses entirely on Hospitality industry; however, this can be used in any other sector.

Research Methodology

Primary Data: Primary Data was collected from 118 respondents by circulating structured questionnaire and online interaction with general audience.

Secondary Data: Secondary Data was collected by referring various brand's social media presence, social media marketing strategies, print and published material, which was available in the form of e-books, webinars, e-journals, e-papers, etc.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

The questionnaire was circulated amongst 160 respondents where in 118 gave their feedback.

Age: Majority (70.3 percent) of the audience age is between 21 and 25 years.

On being asked how familiar they were with social media, 100% of respondents said they are well familiar with social media.

Which of the following social media do you use more?

Instagram: 76; YouTube: 23; Facebook: 12; Twitter: 7 - To identify which social media platform can be more beneficial to invest in for the hospitality industry to which most of the respondents said Instagram and YouTube followed by Facebook and twitter.

How many hours do you spend on the app scrolling in a day?

The analysis is categorised as per the amount hours spent:

3-5 hours: 37.8%; haven't timed but very often: 37.8%; 30mins to an hour: 15.6%; More than 5 hours: 11.1%

How many times have you been influenced by a picture on social media and decided to go to that place or eat at that restaurant / try that dish?

To analyse the power and impact of a picture on respondents and the scale of profit a picture can give to the brand. 44.4% said Yes, sometimes they go to the restaurants to try that dish, another 33.3% said they Very often try out the dish they saw on social media or they go to that restaurant to try that and another 22.2% said they follow this all the time but neither of the respondent said they

don't get influenced by a picture on social media.

Do you follow your favourite restaurant / destination on their social media platforms?

To understand another means to connect with their customers other than newsletters, social media can be very personal and ease the communication on day-to-day basis.

46% of the respondents follow their favourite restaurants on social media platforms.

40% confess that even if they do not follow the restaurants on social media, they often check their profile if they have any new offers or to see what new is happening at the restaurants.

22.2% says they follow quite a few restaurants and travel pages on social media.

Have you ever planned an itinerary looking at pictures on social media?

77.8% people agree that knowingly or unknowingly they plan on visiting/ adding it in the itinerary as the picture/video gets stuck in their minds

13% say once they see something on social media, they create concrete plans on doing that. This could be anything, dish, restaurant, hotel or even a city.

11% of the respondents do not plan on experiencing what the picture is about, they just like to look at it.

Have you seen trending food videos on social media?

Social media has the power to make or break the brand's sales. Social Media is a very powerful and influential platform. A lot of the times a food video starts trending on social media and the response it gets from the viewer who want to try that dish helps the market understand the demand. More than 85% of the people are a fan of such videos. One of the respondent quotes "A lot! In-fact I inspire my cooking from those recipe"

Have you ever felt tempted looking at the videos online example tandoori chai?

To follow up with the previous question, how impactful are these trending videos.

51% respondents answered with 'Yes! Had to try' 15% say they tried and are still a fan of it.

20% do not consumed chai but still tried the trending tandoori Chai to know what the hype was about and only 22% said 'No! Haven't tried'

How many viral food items did you try? (e.g. pull up cakes, pinata cake etc.)

79: Yes; 24:No; 15: I wish too

79 out of 118 respondents have tried maximum viral food dishes like pull up cakes, momos, and fusion food. 24 of them have not tried any yet but they are looking forward to it and 15 have put this as their wish-list. This indicates the power of social media and how influential it can be.

Do you check social media reviews/ tagged pictures of the brand before going to that place?

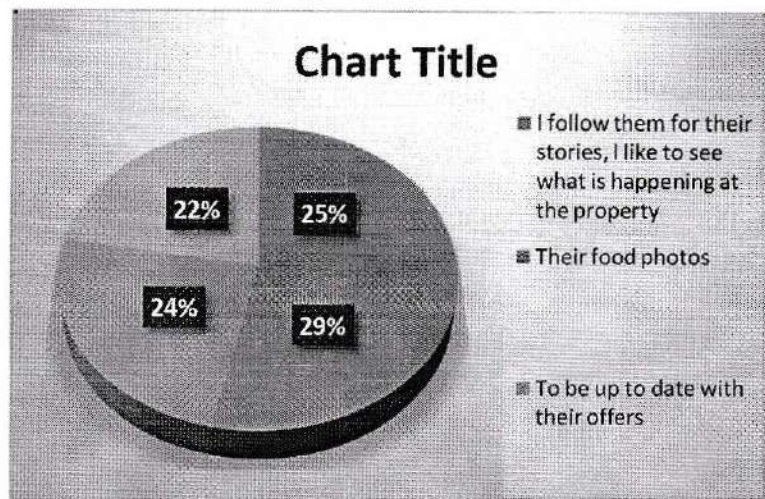
Alongside Zomato reviews and Swiggy reviews, Reviews on social media play an important role. 57.8% feel they get better insight on such platforms and almost check tagged pictures of the brand every time. 31.1% claim to check occasionally and 22.2% solely depend on tagged pictures and their reviews to decide to visit the restaurant. 2.2% says they do not believe strangers on the internet.

On an average how many restaurants, food pages, travel pages do you follow?

To analyse how many restaurants, hotel brands a respondent follows on social media, 60% say they follow quite a few. 13.3% say nearly 10 to 15 accounts. 17.8% say 1 or 2 and 8.9% claim to follow a lot of such brands.

What matters to you when you follow a restaurant on social media?

To understand what is it that the viewer wants from their favourite restaurant's social accounts, the respondents was asked what, is it that attracts them towards the brand and 28.9% said their attractive food photography of dishes, to learn what new good-looking dishes they serve. 24.4% follow them for their stories and daily active and to know what's happening at the property. 24.4% follow them to be updated with their offers and 22.2% for brand aesthetics and how well they manage and represent their brand.



Conclusion

1. Consumers spend a lot of time on these apps. More often they are found browsing on these apps. When you advertise on big boards on signals and roads, it takes a lot of money and the attention span you get is very minimum, Where-as when you post on social media with right strategies, you get greater attention span, The viewer opens and stalks the profile, goes through all the pictures, and tagged pictures, Saves the posts, Shares the profile with the people they want to go with. All of this with minimum cost.
2. Aesthetic food posts have the potential to attract customers at your door, hence more revenue.
3. Customers are interested to keep in touch with their favourite places even after visits and look out for their social pages in hope to see what's happening at the property.
4. When a post is set up at a picturesque spot at your café or the view of the rooftop bar or simply about your property, even if the viewer is not from your city, He/she would unconsciously plan on visiting the brand of when in town.
5. Social media tells a lot about your brand and what to expect. Especially the tagged pictures and food posts. Being active and engaged with the customers is always recommended.
6. Looking at the statistics, customers are interested to keep in touch post their dine-ins at the restaurants too.
7. While starting a brand's social media, professionalism is key, pre-planning the feed using apps like preview or UNUM. Creating a content calendar, using trending hashtags, making attractive highlights and engaging stories, having a budget for food photography.

Recommendations:

From all the above study, it is safe to say that social media plays a major role in bringing numbers to the hospitality industry. It has made building relationships easier and marketing easier at much lesser cost than it was a half a decade to a decade before. Being active on social media and interacting with customers, Uploading the restaurant's best dishes with descriptions/ captions that will tempt them to order food from the restaurant or visit them, Using the correct appropriate hashtags of around 20-25 with niche specific can help bring more attention and reach out to newer, potential customers.

Dedicating a budget to social media will give a good boost and is a long-term investment, Budget can include hiring a social media manager, Food photography, to run ads and influencer marketing. A lot of which of onetime thing and other can be combined.

How influencer marketing works in most of the cases, A restaurant invites a social media influencer, blogger to the restaurant to host them for a dine-in or in case of hotels, Stay which is on the hotel and the blogger or influencers are paid the convenience fees i.e., the travel fees in return of which the restaurant/Hotel asks for a few deliverables on the blogger's social media.

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