

Enhancement of rural tourism through social media usage: an ETAM approach for strategy development

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Abstract Rural India being increasing digitized can now have the same marketing platforms hitherto available to large marketing agencies and professionals. More and more home stays and nature resorts located in rural Punjab, Haryana and Himachal are using social media to attracting customers to these remote locations which are otherwise disconnected to the normal tourists. Social media platforms like facebook , twitter and instagram are being used by the promoters to develop strategy and attract tourists to these remote locations. An Extended Technology Acceptance Model (ETAM) is being used to understand the usage of this platform for tourism enhancement.

Keywords: rural entrepreneurship, tourism, social media, ETAM

Introduction

Social media is defined as a computer –mediated tool that allows people or organization to create, share and exchange ideas, content, information and data to various other groups or individuals present on the network. Mangold and Faulds (2009) have identified some key features of social media communication: (1) it is based on the Web 2.0 platform and users can exchange text as well as visual media, (2) It allows users to generate their own content and share it with members of their own group or related groupings, (3) it helps the users to create their service-specific profiles for the site or application that are maintained by the organization hosting the site, (4) the entire interaction in the social media takes place by connecting the user's profile to other profiles of individuals and organizations . Social media introduces substantial changes in communication between organizations, businesses, communities and individuals. This sort of communication is dialogic (many sources to many receivers) as against the traditional media which is monologic (one source to many receivers). The key aspect that marketers and consumers are adopting social media as a means of communication is the function of *virality* or amplification of one's views through sharing of text and visual media to get a larger audience (ibid.).

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Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) have differentiated these applications as 1) Space timers (location and time sensitive); 2) Space locators (only location sensitive); 3) Quick timers (only time sensitive); 4) Slow timers (neither location nor time sensitive).

The growth of social media has been phenomenal in the last five years 2010-15. Out of the total world population of 7.395 billion, 3.419 billion are the internet users and the active social media usage is approximately 2.307 billion and this figure is growing robustly at the rate of 10% annually. Social media has amazed the marketers in profound way that they are using this channel for advertising purposes and by starting their own homepages targeted at a larger audience. Saravanakumar and Suganthalaksmi,(2012)have stated in their research that companies are taking to social media to bring in brand loyalty, brand equity and customer engagement. A study conducted on these lines by Okazaki and Taylor,(2013) propounded that positive social media campaign helps to reinforce the brand image and build a loyal customer base . Dissatisfied customers can instantly give a negative feedback thus eroding the customer base. Such is the criticality of social media that organizations have full time social media specialists in the advertising department (ibid.).

Social Media and Destination Management

Social media or social networks like facebook , twitter , instagram etc are gradually replacing the traditional media as a source of information for destinations (Bruhn, Schoenmueller, & Schäfer, 2012). Destination management or destination marketing is a growing area of study in recent years. A growing number of travelers are relying on social media for their information needs thus posing problem to the Destination Marketing Organisations (DMOs) (Lange-Faria & Elliot, 2012). Travellers in the current scenario create, share, edit and post information on destination on the web thus exerting an influence on the community or social group members on the net. Examples of content include microblog, videos, photos and other visual user generated content that directly impinges on the travelers minds.

Social media has been extensively used to market destinations by various state owned destinations. A recent study in Italy by Mariani et al (2015) focused on the impact of Facebook as medium of marketing to be used by regional DMOs. For research the study focused on 33,597 posts, including related likes , shares and comments , and analysed them on the basis of metrics to assess engagement , generic engagement , brand engagement and user engagement. It was established that regions with a high percentage of social media activity had a high tourist inflow vis-à-vis DMOs that were lesser in social media activity (Mariani, Di Felice, & Mura, 2016).

Consequently social media poses both challenges and oppurtunities for destination marketers. Mustafa Oz (2006) in his study on travel behavior of Turkish tourists analyzed the underlying causes both during pre-travel and post-travel period(Authors, 2006).

Rural tourism and Leadership typology

Social sustainability and ecological stability combined with employment enhancement forms the main theme for rural tourism .The key components of rural tourism are preservation of culture , traditions and ecology of the destination .these day the rural tourism has also diversified into agriculture tourism , jungle tourism , nature tourism and ecotourism(Bell, Tyrv Äinen, Siev Änen, Pr Obstl, & Simpson, (2007),Pröbstl-Haider, Melzer, & Jiricka, (2014). The current need of rural tourism is the development of leadership that can visualize a framework, communicate the challenges and generate ideas that help in driving rural economy. Destination leadership in rural areas require long term planning and sustained efforts to build tourism infrastructure.

As per Ulrike Probstl-haider et al, 2007 the following typology has been developed based upon common leadership traits of the rural enterprise.

- Lighthouse Model – the main driver is generally one large tourism project such as spa and wellness infrastructure or large hotel unit initiating further spinoffs.
- Small scale land use Model – the tourism development is integrated in agriculture land use.
- Zoning Model – The tourism offer is based on natural integrity in large-scale protected areas.
- Thematic Model - The tourism offer is based on a thematic compilation of different single offers to one product under one thematic umbrella.

Technology Acceptance Model and Perceived Strategic Value in a Social Media Context: The ETAM Approach

The high adoption rates of the Social Media by the public and businesses justify particular interest in the adoption process and in particular on the motives of businesses to adopt these as part of their organizational strategy with emphasis on marketing-related activities.(Lorenzo-Romero, Alarcon-del-Amo, & Constantinides, 2014) offered a detailed view on the dynamics of Social Network and Content Sharing services, showing how the revenue strategies are tightly linked to the technological delivery channel. This area is

becoming even more interesting given the continuous developments and evolution of the behavioral and technology domains. The fast public adoption of mobile Internet terminals like smartphones and tablets means that users have by now ubiquitous connectivity and access to their social networks on a permanent basis.

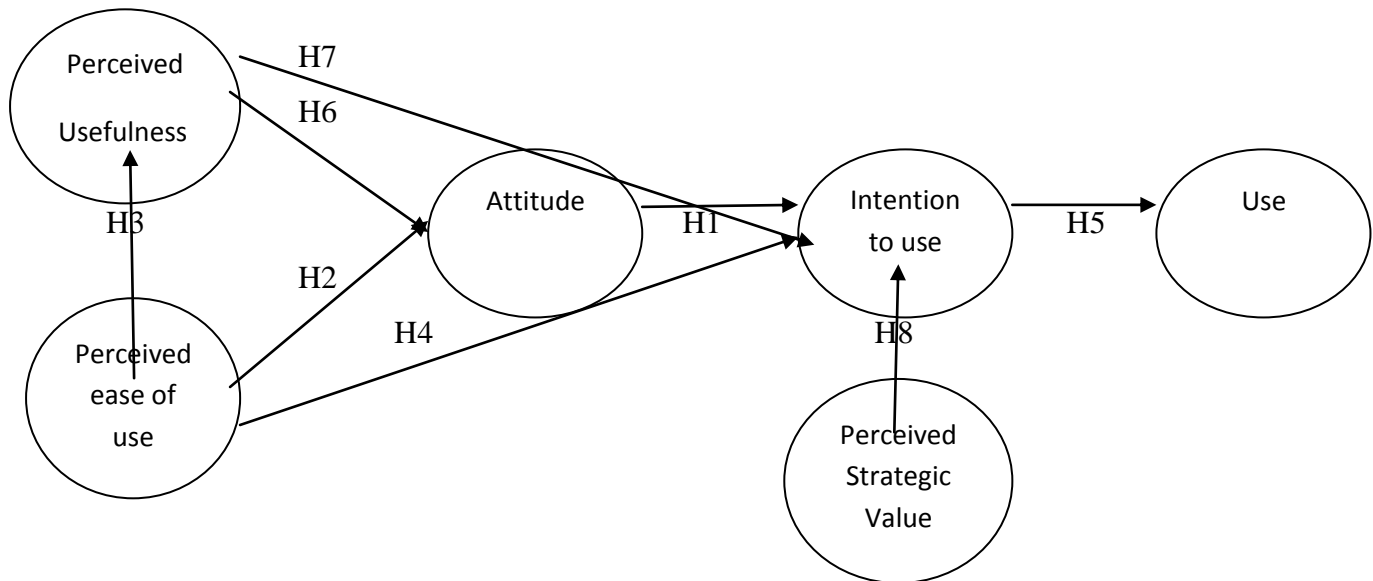
The TAM, introduced by Davis et al (1989) , is one of the most widely accepted approaches to explain the adoption of any technology. This model suggests that perceived usefulness and ease of use are the main beliefs about a new technology that influence the attitude towards their use and predict the intentions to use and adopt this technology; the TAM is the most widely used theoretical concept in this area(Davis, 1989). TAM model analyzes the relationship between attitude and intention to use an online system. It has been used by various researchers in different contexts: Adoption of information technology and information systems, Web, e-commerce, e-mail, and the relevant for our study, some Web 2.0 tools. A strong and widespread positive effect of the attitude on the intention to use has been obtained in different previous studies (Lorenzo-Romero et al., 2014)

The TAM approach is flexible enough to be extended by including other variables which help explain the acceptance and have not been incorporated into the original model. So, it is possible to incorporate additional constructs such as perceived strategic value as in our research, since it is an important variable. Strategic value is the summation of perceived benefits from (Social Media) minus the summation of perceived cost over a period of time .So, the version of Extended Technology Acceptance Model approach is used for our study.

The following variables are considered for ETAM approach:

1. Perceived usefulness
2. Perceived ease of use
3. Attitude
4. Intention to use
5. Strategic Value
6. Use

Diagrammatically it can be represented by the following:



The following research hypothesis is proposed

H1: The attitude towards social media has a positive and significant effect on the intention to use these applications.

H2: The perceived ease of use of social media has a positive and significant effect on the attitude toward these applications.

H3: The perceived ease of use of Web 2.0 tools has a positive and significant effect on the perceived usefulness of using them.

H4: The perceived ease of use of social media tools has a positive and significant effect on the intention to use them.

H5: The intention to use social media tools has a positive and significant effect on the final use of these applications.

H6: The perceived usefulness of social media has a positive and significant effect on the attitude toward these applications.

H7: The perceived usefulness of social media tools has a positive and significant effect on the intention to use them.

H8: The perceived strategic value has a positive and significant effect on the intention to use social media.

Research Methodology

It was identified that there are 256 home-stays and resorts that are active on social media and have a daily or weekly activity on facebook .Out of these 30 resorts were taken as a sample for our study based on their social media usage and nearness to population centre's . For our study resorts and home-stays located near around Chandigarh were taken to administer a 27-point questionnaire based on previous studies conducted by Lorenzo-Romero et al (2013). Many of the resorts on which the study was . These questionnaires were administered on the managers and proprietors of these resorts . Some of the popular resorts to which the questionnaires were administered were Aura Vaseela Vill. Nadial Mohali , Kasbah Resort Vill. Jhanjeri Mohali and Kikar Lodge Vill Nurpur Bedi Roopnagar.

Results

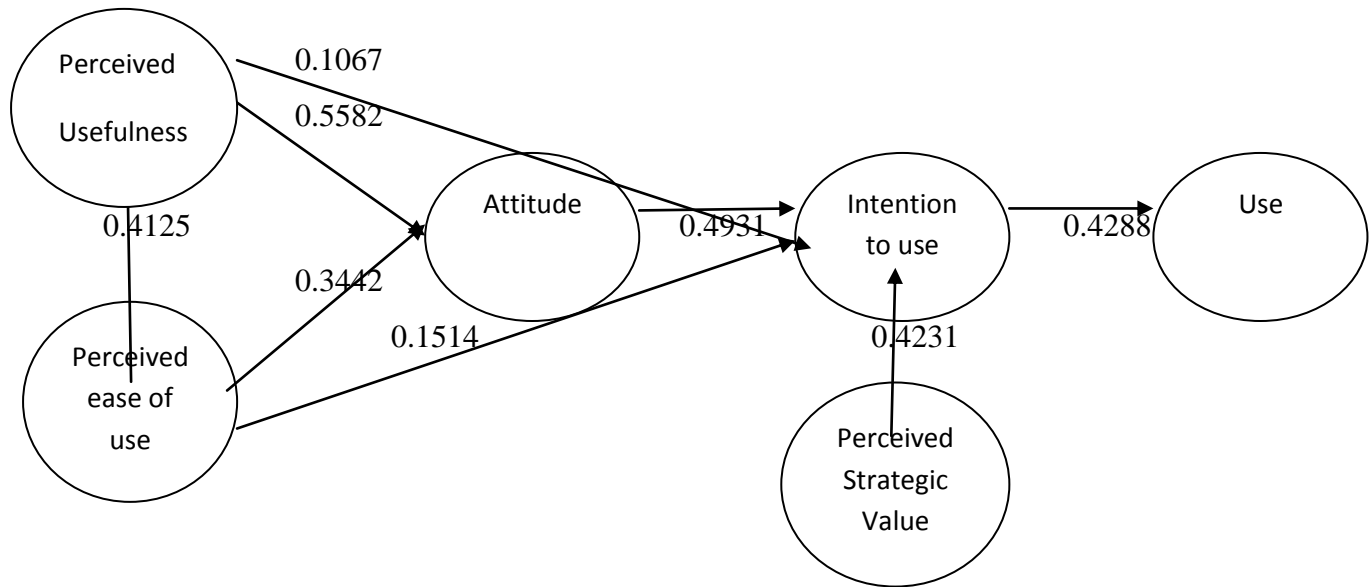
A structural equation modeling (SEM), specifically partial least squares (PLS), is proposed to assess the measurement and structural model. We have used this technique because it is more appropriate for exploratory research and studies with small sample sizes], and because the PLS algorithm shows greater convergence in its simplicity, offering fewer restrictions on the sample size and data normality. In addition, PLS is more appropriate when the number of observations is below 250, as in our case.

SPSS version 12.0 A PLS model is analyzed in two stages: First, the assessment of the reliability and validity of the measurement model and second, the assessment of the structural model.

Construct	Indicator	Loading	t-value (bootstrap)	Crobach's alpha	Composite Reliability (CR)	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
Attitude (A)	A1	0.9454	69.9622	0.9476	0.9623	0.8645
	A2	0.9372	53.3846			
	A3	0.9441	65.0510			
	A4	0.8915	18.3255			
Perceived Ease of Use (PEU)	PEOU1	0.8306	15.0491	0.9286	0.9438	0.7376
	PEOU2	0.7450	11.2387			
	PEOU3	0.9170	49.9155			
	PEOU4	0.8918	34.2073			
	PEOU5	0.8698	27.9037			
	PEOU6	0.8877	22.5731			
Intention to USE (IU)	IU1	0.9232	48.0146	0.9382	0.9563	0.8457
	IU2	0.9606	123.7359			
	IU3	0.9533	90.3288			
	IU4	0.8361	12.4999			
Perceived Usefulness (PU)	PU1	0.7712	12.3437	0.9267	0.9388	0.6325
	PU2	0.7706	11.6113			
	PU3	0.7529	11.2419			
	PU4	0.8918	35.4472			
	PU5	0.8378	21.1738			
	PU6	0.8638	34.6586			
	PU7	0.8888	39.2946			
	PU8	0.6489	6.2256			
	PU9	0.6946	7.8670			
Use	USE1	0.9878	241.4389	0.9772	0.9887	0.9776
	USE2	0.9897	352.9952			
Perceived Strategic Value (PSV)	PSV1	0.6661	10.6170	0.9106	0.9240	0.5046
	PSV2	0.6380	7.1858			
	PSV3	0.7117	9.2991			
	PSV4	0.7444	10.7867			
	PSV5	0.7007	8.4808			
	PSV6	0.6979	9.4976			
	PSV7	0.7661	17.1678			
	PSV8	0.8085	23.1165			
	PSV9	0.7531	19.7420			
	PSV10	0.6460	8.9478			
	PSV11	0.6703	8.6192			
	PSV12	0.7011	10.1652			

		PEOU	IU	PU	USE	PSV
A	0.9298					
PEOU	0.5745	0.8588				
IU	0.8217	0.6008	0.9196			
PU	0.7002	0.4125	0.7200	0.7953		
USE	0.3601	0.1482	0.4288	0.5260	0.9887	
PSV	0.6233	0.4561	0.7262	0.7676	0.3903	0.7103

Diagonal elements are the square root of average variance extracted (AVE) between the constructs and their measures. Off-diagonal elements are correlations between constructs.



Conclusions

The direct influence of perceived ease of use on the intention to use, and indirectly through changes in the attitude component of the TAM model, and its influence on perceived usefulness, highlights the central role of the fact that an individual perceives the Social Media as an instrument which is no complex to use as a business tool in the adoption. The relevance of this variable has been the focus of extensive research in the field of usability, navigability and interactivity.

The practical implications of this study are that the Social Media as marketing strategy are viewed in the field in a very positive way. The perception of most managers is that adoption of Social Media (which most of them are using privately as well) as part of their strategy will yield many advantages for their organization. This attitude is quite interesting and should be further investigated; it seems that the attitude and the willingness to adopt and use the Social Media as business tools is facilitated by the fact that many of these managers are already private users of social media. Social media can be a force-multiplier for enhancing the rural tourism industry as these resorts and home-stays do not have the advantages that the Organized hotel chains like Taj , Marriot and Hyatt have for attracting clientele .

Questionnaire

ITEM

SOURCE

ITEM		SOURCE
Perceived Usefulness		
PU1	I think social media helps us improve our services to customer	(Fred D. Davis, 1989)(Teo, Lim, & Lai, 1999)(F D Davis, Bagozzi, & Warshaw, 1992)
PU2	I think social media helps us to increase profitability	
PU3	I think social media helps us to advertise to potential tourists	
PU4	I think advantages of using social media outweighs its disadvantages	
PU5	I think using social media helps us in getting more information that helps us in giving better services to tourists	
PU6	Overall, I think social media is advantageous for our hotel .	
Perceived ease of use		
PEOU1	I think it is easy to get to do social media what you want .	(F D Davis et al., 1992)(Fred D. Davis, 1989)
PEOU2	I think interacting with social media is clear and understandable.	
PEOU3	I think it is easy for us to be skillful in use of social media	
PEOU4	I think it is possible to use social media without expert help	
PEOU5	Overall , I think social media is easy to use	
Attitude		
A1	I think using social media is a good idea	(Fred D. Davis, 1989)(Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975)
A2	I think using social media is a wise idea	
A3	I think using social media is a positive idea	
A4	I like the idea of using social media	
Intention to use		
IU1	It is probable I will continue to use social media	(Fred D. Davis, 1989)
IU2	I will frequently use social media	
IU3	I will recommend others to use social media	
USE		
USE1	I frequently use social media	D. Davis, 1989)
Perceived Strategic value		
PSV1	Improves the image of hotel	(Grandon &

PSV2	Helps us to improve services to cater to customer needs	Pearson, 2004)(Murphy, Benckendorff, & Moscardo, 2007)(Qu, Kim, & Im, 2011)
PSV3	Social media helps bring customers to our area and enhance image of our area.	
PSV4	Social media helps to bring in tourist revenue to the area	
PSV5	Social media helps in employment generation for local populace.	
PSV6	Social media provides information about our area for all potential visitors	
PSV7	Social media helps our managers in making strategic decisions	
PSV8	Social media helps us to be competitive in the tourism market	

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