

Impacts of Social Branding on Tourism Business: The Case of Bangladesh

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The purpose of this article is to find out the impacts of social branding on tourism business. The data have been collected through a structured questionnaire from 20 renowned tourism companies randomly from the different areas of Chittagong City, Bangladesh from the month of August to October, 2015. From the correlation analysis, it has been found that there is a positive correlation among all the factors related to promoting business that have been influenced by the social branding. From the paired sample t test we see that there is a significant difference between the effects on the arrangements for domestic & international tours by using social branding and without using social branding. Results of the study on the subject of social branding in the tourism industry suggest the organizations to have a strong presence on social media, allowing for consistent and effective two way communication between themselves and the consumers for expanding the business.

Keyword: Social Branding, Tourism Business, Social Media, Customers.

Field of Research: Marketing

1. Introduction

The rise in popularity of social branding has led social networking to become a global phenomenon. Social networking sites allow internet users to connect with people and create information and can be used to provide low cost, but effective customer care and product support. Through the social media network, the tourism business can generate two way conversations with their customers and encourage them to tell their travel story and information even faster and with less cost. On the other hand, customers use social media as a research tool in deciding where to book their next vacation and it helps when booking locations have a destination image for them to see. Social networking sites are originally used for entertainment purposes, however an increase in the use of the Internet and information communication technologies has shifted the way people communicate with each other, mainly in the hospitality and tourism industries (Assenov & Khurana, 2012; Clark & Roberts, 2010).

Social networking sites like Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, LinkedIn, Instagram allow registered users to interact globally and freely with people who share the same interest by uploading photos, sharing posts, chatting, commenting on the posts and also getting replies, such features allow companies to get quick feedback from consumers whereas consumers are able to receive responses immediately. The advertisements are often used by people on social networking sites and these online advertisements appear to be more

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trustworthy than advertisements from mass media like televisions, radio, newspaper and magazines. Manap and Adzharudin pointed out that consumers were more likely to be convinced to buy a product that is recommended by people who had experienced it (experience goods) rather than a search. The researchers also stated that it is frequently possible to utilize this strategy in the tourism industry (2013).

By using social branding the community will connect, retain and help to grow the business. It is the best way to promote the business by the cheapest form of marketing and advertising. By the feedback from the customers that businesses can improve their services and offers. It also helps to develop new services, harvest customer ideas, opinions and insights. E-Newsletters and blogging will enable customers to be kept up to speed on developments, offers and services in a very competitive and ever changing market. By using social media channels organization can create a new route to market for advertising new products, attracting new customers and promoting the brand.

Bangladesh is an attractive market for the tourism business, but maximum tourism companies follow the traditional promotion policies here. But to stay in today's modern society where all are now depending on the internet and social media, it is necessary for the tourism companies to cope-up with the technology based customers. So the researcher's objectives are to identify whether the social branding has any impact on tourism business or not? What types of customer purchase the services? Which factors will be used in social media by them to help the business? To explore whether the number of tours is affected by the social branding or not.

This research focuses on how social media can influence the prospective tourists on choosing where to travel. It also examines how travelers share their trip experiences online. The main objective of the study is to find out the impacts of social media on tourism organizations. Specifically the objectives can be defined as:

1. To identify the impacts of social branding on tourism business.
2. To find out the types of customer who use social media in making purchase decision.
3. To explore the impacts of customer feedback in attracting new online shoppers.
4. To compare either the number of tours has been affected by the social branding or not.

The paper is organized as follows. Section 2 reviews the literature related to social branding and its impact on tourism business, while the third section discusses the methodologies. The fourth section presents survey results and analysis of data. The fifth section concludes the paper with the summary of findings, the implications of the study, and the limitations of the study.

2. Literature Review

Before the internet, destination marketing organizations (DMO) reached a targeted market of tourists by brand advertising for a destination resulting in one-way communication with the consumer. The internet has allowed for two-way communication between destination marketing organizations and the consumer with the use of social media (Lim et al, 2012). Tourism organizations post their activities on social sites such as blogs, YouTube and Facebook results in consumer responses and feedback. Social media has given the tourism industry new tools to facilitate effective, two-way communication in which consumer

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generated content contributed to the destination image available to prospective tourists (Lim et al, 2012).

Within the tourism industry, a destination image is “the sum of beliefs, ideas and impressions that a person has of a destination” (Crompton, 1979, as cited in Klabi, 2012, p. 311). It has “symbolic” value-expressive attributes that contribute to the brand personality of a destination. When a tourist finds a destination brand personality congruent with their own self-concept that is known as self-congruity (Boksberger et al, 2011). The self-congruity theory was first applied to the tourism industry in 1992 by Kye-Sung Chon (Beerli et al, 2007). Kye-Sung Chon at the University of Nevada-Las Vegas, USA conducted a study using the self-image/product image congruity model of the self-concept theory, to examine the relationship between a tourist's self-concept and his or her satisfaction or dissatisfaction with a destination. The results of the study and those that followed found that “the higher the agreement between self-concept and destination image, the greater the satisfaction of the tourist.” (Beerli et al, 2007, p. 572).

Negative reviews can be dangerous for a hotel or destination because, “according to Xiang and Gretzel (2010), social media sites are substantially directed to those who look for travel information through search engines. Social media has become one of the major sources of online travel information,” (O’C, onnor, 2008; Xiang and Gretzel, 2010 as cited in Lim et al, 2012, p. 198).

The explosive growth of the population of Internet user of social networking sites has had a huge impact on hospitality and tourism industry whereby consumers are changing the rule of marketing. In addition, social networking sites also help to record the information of consumers so that it is easy to be obtained whenever needed (Assenov & Khurana, 2012). Tourists create consumer-generated content of their travels that can influence an audience of prospective tourists. Consumer-generated content is considered “a mixture of fact and opinion, impression and sentiment, founded and unfounded tidbits, experiences, and even rumor”. Blackshaw and Nazzaro as cited in Lim et al, 2012, p. 199). It consists of content such as videos, photos, essays or blog posts aimed at educating other consumers about products, brands, services, and issues (Blackshaw and Nazzaro as cited in Lim et al, 2012).

All of the researchers have contributed their work on social media and tourism business and their impacts, but they have not compared the numbers of tours that has been affected by the social branding or not. This research paper also helps to find out the types of customer who do the most responses to purchase the services and the factors that are used in social media by them which will help a lot for the best contribution of the business. On the basis of these objectives and for Bangladesh perspective, it has not yet done by any other authors of this country.

In order for a company to be successful in tourism business, it is necessary for marketers make decisions based on consumer needs, changes in society and also the development of technology. By doing, it not only satisfies consumers, but also strengthens the relationship with customers to ensure they make a comeback.

The study has launched with the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1

Null Hypothesis: There is no impact of social branding on promoting tourism business.

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Alternative Hypothesis: There is an impact of social branding on promoting tourism business. Here the researcher has assumed the number of tours/trips as the measurement of performance of tourism business.

Hypothesis 2

Null Hypothesis: There is no significant difference in the number of domestic tours arranged before and after use of social branding.

Alternative Hypothesis: There is a significant difference in the number of domestic tours arranged before and after use of social branding.

Hypothesis 3

Null Hypothesis: There is no significant difference in the number of international tours arranged before and after use of social branding.

Alternative Hypothesis: There is a significant difference in the number of international tours arranged before and after use of social branding.

3. Methodology

This segment discusses the methods of data collection, which include data sources, collection and presentation of data, and delimitations.

3.1 Data Sources

A survey was conducted using a sample of convenience gathered via social media. The interview questions were tailored to each individual's area of knowledge to get the most relevant information regarding social media and tourism. The customers were asked to fill in a structured questionnaire by indicating their degree of agreement on a five-point Likert scale (strongly agree to strongly disagree). Here we assume 1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=no comment/neutral, 4=agree, 5=strongly agree.

3.2 Data Collection

The research is mainly based on the survey through a questionnaire. The data has been collected through a structured questionnaire from 20 renowned tourism companies randomly from the different areas of Chittagong City, Bangladesh. Due to time and resource constraints, Chittagong was selected. Data were collected by the post-graduate marketing students in the month of August to October, 2015 by visiting the tourism companies personally and through social media as well. The questions were tailored to each individual regarding their relation to the tourism industry who frequently uses the social media. Tailoring the questions allowed for multiple perspectives regarding the research questions and allowed for the most information to be extracted from their area of expertise. They were asked a series of questions regarding their intake of social media and other means of information and the effect it has on their choice of vacation destination.

4. Findings and Analysis

4.1 Correlation Analysis:

Table 1: Correlation Analysis

Control Variables			Correlations		
			Uses of a social brand to promote offers by the company	Help to reduce promotional costs and save time	Promotional activities of the served customers through social branding
Impacts of social brand	Uses of a social brand to promote offers by the company	Correlation	1.000	.445	.411
		Significance (2-tailed)	.	.056	.081
		df	0	17	17
	Help to reduce promotional costs and save time	Correlation	.445	1.000	.237
		Significance (2-tailed)	.056	.	.328
		df	17	0	17
	Promotional activities of the served customers through social branding	Correlation	.411	.237	1.000
		Significance (2-tailed)	.081	.328	.
		df	17	17	0

From the above table, we see that there is a positive correlation between all the factors which have been impacted by the social branding. Promoting offers by the company had a moderate positive correlation with the help to reduce time & cost [$r=.445$, $n=17$, $p>.05$] and the promotional activities of the served customers through social branding [$r=.411$, $n=17$, $p>.05$].

Help to reduce promotional cost & time had a moderate positive correlation with the social brand that is promoted by the company [$r=.445$, $n=17$, $p>.05$] and positive correlation with the promotional activities of the served customers through social branding [$r=.237$, $n=17$, $p>.05$].

Promotional activities of the served customers through social branding had a moderate positive correlation with the social brand that is promoted by the company [$r=.445$, $n=17$, $p>.05$] and positive correlation with the help reduce time & cost for the promotional activities [$r=.237$, $n=17$, $p>.05$].

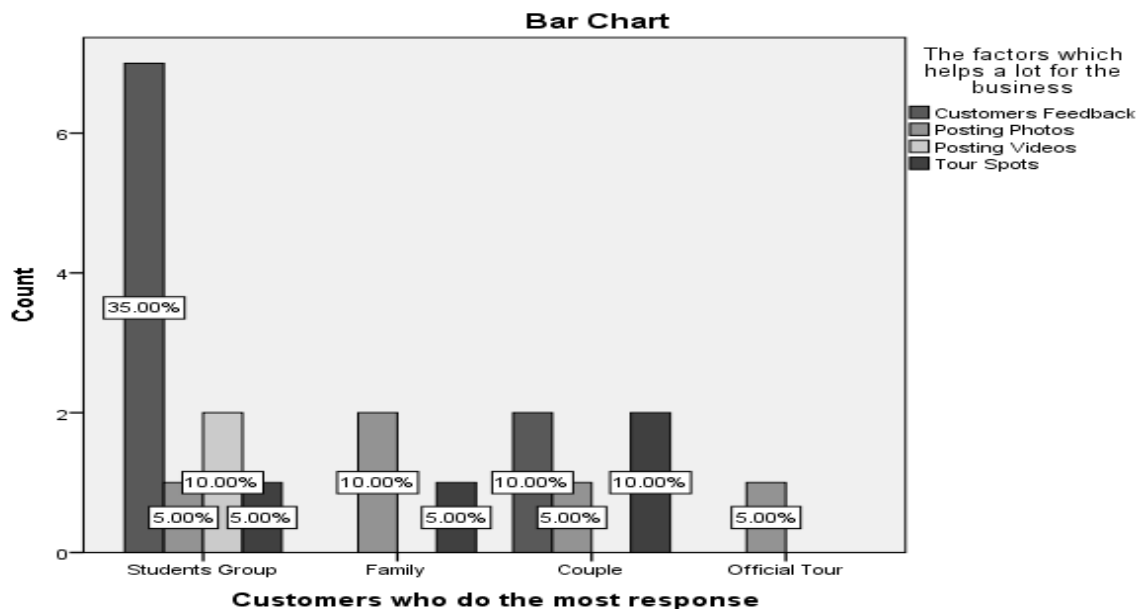
Thus, **Hypothesis 1** gets accepted as the impact of social branding has a positive relationship with the factors which will help to promote the tourism business.

4.2 Customer Response

Table 2: Customers Who Purchase the Services and Their Feedback Helps the Tourism Business

		N	Marginal Percentage
The factors which help a lot for the business	Customers Feedback	9	45.0%
	Posting Photos	5	25.0%
	Posting Videos	2	10.0%
	Tourist Spots	4	20.0%
	Students Group	11	55.0%
Customers who do the most response	Family	3	15.0%
	Couple	5	25.0%
	Official Tour	1	5.0%
Valid		20	100.0%
Missing		0	
Total		20	

Figure 1: Customers who Purchase the Services and Their Feedback



From the above table and figure we see that social branding has more influence on the student group (55%), than couples (25%) and family members (15%) to purchase the tour packages. On the other hand, we see that, student groups and the couples are sharing their opinions (45%), all types of customers are responding by posting their tour photos (25%). All types of customers' response by posting tour spot photos (20%) except official tour group. Only the student group uploads the videos (10%) in the social media as the feedback. It is really a great contribution for any tourism company to get the responses from customers and it will help to attract the new customers as well.

4.3 Paired Sample Test

Table 3: Paired Sample Test

		Paired Differences				t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
					Lower				Upper
Pair 1	Domestic tours without social branding - Domestic tours through social branding	-.600	1.273	.285	-1.196	-.004	2.108	19	.049
Pair 2	International tours without social branding - International tours through social branding	-.450	.887	.198	-.865	-.035	2.269	19	.035

From the above table, we see that, there is a substantial divergence between the effects on the arrangements for domestic & international tours by using social branding and without using social branding. By using the social branding, the tourism company's tour operations increase in both cases. Thus **Hypothesis 2** and **Hypothesis 3** get rejected.

5. Conclusion

Bangladesh is an attractive market for tourism business, but here maximum tourism companies follow the traditional promotion policy. But to stay in today's modern society where all are now depending on the internet and social media, it is necessary for the tourism companies to cope-up with the technology based customers. Social branding strategy is getting popular in the hospitality and tourism industry. The findings of this study show that it would be a mistake for hotels and marketing destination organizations to not have a presence on social media. Social branding has also given the opportunity for the industries to connect with their consumers and employees in a quick and efficient way. The quantity of time consumers spend on social media can be used to deliver a destination image to consumers. It also serves as a way to converse with consumers and share information about updates, deals, and giveaways. A constant voice in social media has allowed marketers to always be in front of their consumers and be in constant contact with them.

Communication is the key when it comes to pleasing customers and creating a more satisfying trip for them. After a satisfying trip consumers can in return post their own content on social media, providing additional information about a destination for fellow travelers. The tourism industry deals with potential travelers, people on a trip, and people returning from a trip and sharing their experience. With social media, these travelers now have more tools to

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better equip them in every aspect of travel from research and purchase to experiencing and sharing.

Lastly, social networking sites allows everyone and anyone to write their opinions and post it online, which not only brings advantages to the company, but also disadvantageous because certain users might defame the brand through word of mouth. As per the results of the studies on the subject of social media in the tourism industry, it would be wise for the organizations to have a strong presence on social media, allowing for consistent and effective two way communication between themselves and the consumer for expanding the business and help to attract the new customers as well.

The study is conducted taking the renowned companies as population and due to time and resource constraints, Chittagong city has been selected. But a large number of companies are not included in the paper. Such companies would not be considered because of constraints like difficulties in access to many other companies in the survey as well as the unavailability of required data. But the inclusion of these companies and other cities of Bangladesh could make the research more representative and might provide with many other interesting findings. Future researchers will expand and improve this and attempts to replicate the findings in a great demand and would be contributing to the tourism sectors in Bangladesh.

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