Location Based Social Media Content: A Conceptual Paper on Travellers Purchase Decisions

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to conceptualize the significance of location based user generated content in creating superior value to aid travellers in their decision making regarding traveling products and services. A comprehensive review of latest conceptual and empirical literature was grounded to develop the propositions. Millennial generation of Malaysia shall be taken as a social lab for examining the propositions, and to report the empirical findings. The finding of this study provides a basis for developing a model to obtain the significance of location base user generated content on travel decisions. This study could be of practical value for organizations and highlighted the importance of participatory user generated content as well as significant for travellers who want to improve on-travel decisions accuracy. This study suggested a special focus on millennials in Malaysia since they are considered as a potential cluster of markets. This paper makes a significant contribution by developing a conceptual framework to improve travel decision accuracy through location base user generated content among millennials in Malaysia.

Keywords: Social Media Networking, User-generated content, location based recommendation, and Traveller decisions.

INTRODUCTION

Nowadays in highly competitive markets where the changes in urban lifestyles impose a new order in productions, development of infrastructure and digital technologies that offer a range of services for citizens, accordingly social media and location based social networks are two of them. Altogether, "it seems to be indispensable running a business without any online presence" (Schwarzl & Grabowska, 2015), especially since travel products and services seem to be well suited to online selling – they are "high involvement products less tangible and more differentiated than many other consumer goods", these characteristics making them more appropriate to be purchased over the Internet (Garín-Muñoz & Pérez-Amaral, 2011). Furthermore, the Web is also shifting travel and tourism marketing practices from a B2C approach to a peer-to-peer model (Akçura, and Altınkemer, 2002), mainly in what regards information sharing, so a good, extensive understanding of the e-mechanisms designed for spreading information online can facilitate tourism companies to market their businesses via the Internet efficiently and effectively.

In this regard, one of the most important online tools is used nowadays in Travel and Tourism sector is location based social networking, it provides information based on location subjective to user's profile and check-in into any location. It also provides a facility to track family and friends despite of any distance, moreover, it also provides services for social engagements. Margherita (2014) stated that location-based services are getting popular than the traditional ways of communications in searching for location-based information, while Buhalis et al. (2008) claimed that tourist mostly focus on price sensitivity and are more selective, most of them try to minimize the expenditure of resources in travel planning because of deployment of Information and communication technologies in tourism planning. (Alisha & Andrew, 2014; Kupper, 2005). In context of business to business applications, tourism is currently one of the leading industries in online business (Werthner & Ricci, 2004).

A social network is a social structure based on social actors and relationships between them such as interest in common, social knowledge shared and friendships. Online social networking is a digitalize depiction of realistic world's social network provides by a web-based service. The social networking services provide a user to connect with its real-world social connections, allowing them to enrich their contacts through communication sharing about, activities, news events, interests and ideas with much user-friendly and entertaining fashion. The addition of location as a spatial aspect reinforces social networking as Geosocial Network which uses the geographic location services which is further enhanced by geo-tagging and geo-coding to provide supplementary social dynamics that turn out as Location-based Social Network (Quercia et al. 2010). Zheng further elaborates the concept for these location-based social networks, as:

> "A location-based social network (LBSN) does not only mean adding a location to an existing social network so that people in the social structure can share location embedded information, but also consists of the new social structure made up of individuals connected by the interdependency derived from their locations in the physical world as well as their location-tagged media content, such as photos, video, and text. Here, the physical location consists of the instant location of an individual at a given timestamp and the location history that an individual has accumulated in a certain period. Further, the interdependency includes not only that two persons co-occur in the same physical location or share similar location histories but also the knowledge, e.g., common interests, behaviours, and activities, inferred from an individual's location (history) and location-tagged data." (p. 244, 2011)

To motivate potential tourists and other perspectives of tourism industry, location-based services could be utilized to make tourism more enjoyable by providing the need for information resources a tourist needed. Grarcia-Crespo, et al. (2009) highlighted that technology-based value-added services can fill the information gap for the tourism industry, these internet applications can offer entertainment and interactive user interface subjective to location-based services. These applications can be a bridge between tourism industry and a tourist by providing added value services to the people with the interest in the industry.

"A group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, that allow the creation and exchange of user generated content" (Kaplan

& Haenlein, 2010), increasing power of Word-of-Mouth (WOM), transforming it into electronic-Word-of-Mouth (eWOM), and expanding the potential audience beyond the traditional parties, family and friends, to new, wider, geographically dispersed networks of strangers (Lo, McKercher, Lo, Cheung, & Law, 2011). As such, "at the start of the process when inspiration is sought, the recommendations of family and friends (via social networking) are the most used source of information" (Rushton & Kennell, 2015), and, when compared to traditional forms of advertising, it was found that people trust eWOM more (Jamaludin, Aziz, Mariapan, & Lim, 2017). Gretzel (2007) in cooperation with TripAdvisor undertook one of the most comprehensive studies on the influence of online travel reviews on potential travellers – roughly 1500 TripAdvisor users answered an online survey, revealing that reading other consumers' posts in social media is the most frequently used source of information for travellers and that users usually consider user generated content sites and platforms most reliable, enjoyable and up to date. Additionally, most recent related data revealed that 52% of Facebook users in the admitted that their friends' photos inspired their travel choices, proving again that eWOM is the most credible form of advertising and social media might be a valuable tool for travel brands that intend to engage travellers (Maria-Irina and Istudor, 2019). Plus, 83% of Millennials stated that they would not mind letting travel applications track their digital behavior if this would provide them with a more personalized, satisfying travel experience, showing that now travellers are quite open to these practices as long as there is a win-win result (MDG Advertising, 2017).

In a top of vacation-inspiration sites made in 2017, Facebook ranked first, with 29%, followed by TripAdvisor 14% (Carter, 2017), while Instagram is expected to get the lead in the near future, given that nowadays people engage with Instagram posts and stories ten times more than they do with Facebook (Miller, 2017). Even though people use Social Media mainly when looking for travel information (27% research destinations, 23% hotels, 22% vacation activities, 21% attractions, 17% restaurants), research showed that they continue to use it also while they are on vacation or even post-holiday - while still traveling, 72% of people post pictures on a Social Network, and 70% of them update their Facebook status with travel-related information. Plus, after coming back from a trip, 76% of travellers post photos from holiday, 55% like Facebook pages related to their vacation, 46% post hotel reviews, 40% post-touristic-attractions reviews, and 40% post restaurant reviews (Carter, 2017). Some other statistics are even more persuasive for travel business that are considering online marketing for presenting and promoting their products and services: according to a survey commissioned by Chase Card Services on 1002 travellers aged 18-67, 97% share their travel photos, while 73% of them even post on Social Media at least once per day during the holiday and 87% use Facebook for travel inspiration. Thus, user generated content can influence the whole trip and the daily activities decision while on holiday, as real-time images shared, for example, during some events, might often inspire others to attend attractions or events they had not initially planned. Of all the persons questioned, millennial consumers are more likely (44%) than other older-aged travellers (35-49 year-old 28% and 50-67 year-old 11%) to seek opinions on Social Media while they research a prospective holiday.

Therefore, the present research conceptualizes the importance of location based user generated content on social media for the decision making process of Travels in choosing a travel destination and their impact on traveller's behaviour. Although there have been constant increases in international tourist arrivals after the economic crisis from 2008 and the UNWTO's forecasts of further increase until 2020 (World Tourism Organization, 2018), studies on the topic have been

scarce. The role of user generated content travel sites have been investigated, answering questions and testing hypotheses related to the role of user generated content on travels decision, however, there is scarcity in studies on location base user generated content (Martí-Ciriquián, García-Mayor, & Serrano-Estrada, 2019). Shukla (2016) while conducting research on electronic word of mouth, consumer behaviour and travel industry, explored that the traveller has become more aware about use of online portals, social networking websites and links on service providers website. In order to find out the quality service provided by any specific service providers or the level of services available to and from any particular destination, the travellers use the reviews made available by early travellers. These reviews are available in the form of text massages, star rating, videos or pictures. The traveller today is not only using this electronic word of mouth to access the information about quality of services but they also use these online platforms to share their experiences in the form of consumer generated content. Consumer generated content can be helpful in the movement area as it accompanies the capacity to feature human feelings and relate these to singular brand encounters. Thus, the paper aims at conceptualize the benefits of location based recommendations for stakeholders in the Travel and Tourism industry, as marketers need a deep understanding of the traveller behaviour in order to pursue strategic decisions.

In this conceptual paper, an attempted census of relevant research was made through manual scanning and searching from different databases for empirical researches published in past years. In the process of literature review, researchers reviewed the most relevant studies to support the idea of this paper. Hence, this study is intended to develop some propositions to examine the theoretical impact of location based user-generated content on travellers purchase decision with moderator variable millennials. On basis of the literature review, this study proposed a conceptual framework for the development of the research model

CONCEPTUALIZATION OF LITERATURE AND PROPOSITION DEVELOPMENT

In this research study, Uses and gratification theory was adopted to provide a theoretical foundation through which the link between user-generated content and travel decision can be established. The uses and gratification theory was established on the declaration that users are dynamic, competent to perceive their own needs and capable to select entertainment to delight explicit needs or potentially want (Blumler, 1979; Katz, Blumler, and Gurevitch 1973). In this way, Uses and gratification theory concentrate on what users did while using media and what effect user generated content created on users, though influence of media has evolved fundamentally throughout the years as users motivations have been studied and classified according to user function and capacities (Alhabash and McAlister, 2015; Katz et al., 1973). Subsequently, uses and gratification theory has extended to incorporate usage of media according to the intentions and preferences of users (Rubin 2009). Uses and gratification theory provides an alternative option to internet users as opposed to traditional media effects featured by McLeod and Beckner in 1974 and even in earlier studies from Herzog during the 1940s. Moreover, with dramatic changes and advancement in technology, uses and gratification theory highlighted an appropriate theory for in-depth understanding about how consumers associated with the modern technologies around them (Alhabash, McAlister, Lou, & Hagerstrom, 2015; Hayes, Carr, & Wohn, 2016; Kim & Lee, 2016). Additionally, researchers proposed that usage of Internet and social networking sites can be craft based on the concept of uses and gratification theory, as this theory supports the themes of content

gratification, process gratification, and social gratification are present (Chan, 2014; Kujur & Singh, 2017; LaRose, Mastro, and Eastin, 2001; Stafford, Stafford, & Schkade 2004).

Location Based User Generated Content

In the given context, the potential and influence of user generated content are hard to be ignored and it can be certainly stated that digital platforms are changing the way travel is traditionally researched, bought, sold, shared, and experienced (Salem and Twining-Ward, 2018). Broadly speaking, "the social media shared by users, along with the associated metadata are collectively known as user generated content" (Moens, Li, & Chua, 2014), but this concept can also be met in various papers as "user created content" or "consumer generated media"; it comes in any language, from a great range of sources, including social networking sites such as Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, YouTube or Twitter, from question-answering websites like Wiki-Answers or Yahoo! Answers, as well as from forums or blogs. According to Eastin, Daugherty, and Burns (2011), user generated content and eWOM must not be confused, as user generated content is the Internet content published by everyday consumers, not media or communication professionals, while in the eWOM category any statement, positive or negative, made by potential, actual or former consumers about a product or a brand posted online and made available to a wide public can be included.

Compared to traditional marketing tools, user generated content's economic benefits, although meaningful, they are not quite self-evident. The most important advantage of Social Media would be that on the Social Media platforms people reveal personal information and preferences without being asked to, because "uploading content has become second nature" (Salem & Twining-Ward, 2018) while when they are asked officially by marketers, they either cannot or do not want to provide such valuable information for businesses. Therefore, more accurate, complex, well-targeted and tailor-made marketing campaigns can be done using the information readily-available in Social Media. Some other authors consider that the most valuable characteristic of user generated content is the knowledge one can learn about life at local level, user generated content becoming a predominant source of information about various geographic features, such as cities, towns, local attractions, etc. (Hecht & Gergle, 2010). Additionally, studying the communities members, their roles in the community and profiling them in a structured manner could also be important aspect businesses and marketers should take into consideration (Mkono & Tribe, 2017).

Moreover, it has been noticed that most user generated content have a significant influence on tourists' expectations related to the destination of choice, while the level of satisfaction is rather indirectly connected to user generated content sources (Kaosiri et al. 2019). For example, in regards to the hotel customers' recommendation, it was found that willingness to recommend a hotel to others is more related to intangible aspects, such as staff members, while the dissatisfaction comes more often from the tangible aspects of the hotel stay, such as rooms furnishing or value for money (Berezina, Bilgihan, Cobanoglu, & Okumus, 2016).

Location Based User Generated Content and Traveller Purchase Decisions

Customer information and communication needs and the use of different types of online resources where information is generated by the user have a significant role in travel decision-making

process which is demonstrated and can be seen in up to date researches. (Gretzel, Fesenmaier, and O'Leary, 2006). Therefore, from the start of planning a journey it is likely that a traveller may look onto internet to learn about the destinations he is planning to visit and notify about his purchase decision of air company tickets or look online to manage his accommodation or hotel reservation for his upcoming vacation (Gretzel, Fesenmaier, Lee and Tussyadiah, 2010). By providing good feedback (reviews, ratings, and suggestions) the user generated content facilitates travel from the initial stages where he just needs to perform a query searching on internet (Xiang and Gretzel, 2010) with a very entertaining user-friendly interface (Ladhari and Michaud, 2015).

In literature, Cox, Burgess, Sellitto, and Buultjens (2009) found that user generated content is only being considered by the most travellers for finding hotel reservations after finalizing a destination, However, it had been argued by Jeng and Fesenmaier (2002) to avoid or minimize the risk of making wrong decision the travellers usually look into the online user generated content (reviews from various resources) from the beginning of their travel decision-making process. Accordingly, Lo et al. (2011) established an opinion that travel blogs and reviews have a significant influence on traveller's decision-making process in choosing a destination (Xiang & Gretzel, 2010; Jacobsen & Munnar, 2012). Further support can be found in studies investigating users based on well-known location based social network TripAdvisor which is basically a user generated content platform where travellers look into information and provide reviews about destinations (Gretzel, Yoo, and Purifoy 2007).

Apparently many studies have shown that to obtain knowledge for specific destination and for generating ideas, reviews have been taken into account which initiates further search for traveling-related services and products. Despite the fact, as revealed in studies above mentioned that user generated content has great influence on travellers decision making process. However, most of the researches are limited to somewhat user generated content based on reviews and blog post which are considered as travel-specific platforms. Although a number of studies were found on online social media strategies and online marketing with the target of travel and tourism, however, there is still a substantial gap specifically when location based social network is considered as user generated content for decision making process plus influence of these platforms on traveller's behaviour and decision making process specifically in Malaysia.

Needless to mention that, Malaysia despite being one of the fastest-growing tourist destinations, studies on this topic are currently quite limited. In Malaysia international tourist has been growing by 3.8% every year for the period to 2010 to 2020 according to a report published by the World Tourism Organization (2018) plus in 2017 it touched the highest increase after 2009 world economic crises. Thus, on the basis of literature review researchers conceptualize the link relationship between location based social networking recommendations on travellers' decisions.

Millennial as Moderator Variable

The millennial as internet users are particularly focused in this conceptual study. Millennials are being empowered by the internet usage, social media networking (Smith, 2011) and exceptionally motivated to acquire adventure travel and tourism experience (Airbnb and the Rise of Millennial Travel, 2016). The millennial users are those internet users who were born between 1980 to 2000, in a broader view of the term. In another explicit view of the term millennial are those people who

born between 1982 to 1994. In this study, researchers suggested to considered broader view of the millennial term as it results in targeted age range of 19 to 39 years old users required in the study as this range considered as most popular internet users age (A-Qader, Omar, & Rubel, 2017; Bucuta, 2015; DeVaney, 2015). Villegas (2015) stated that "Millennials behavior has been developed by the technology driven world they have come in age, and their significance cannot be miscalculated".
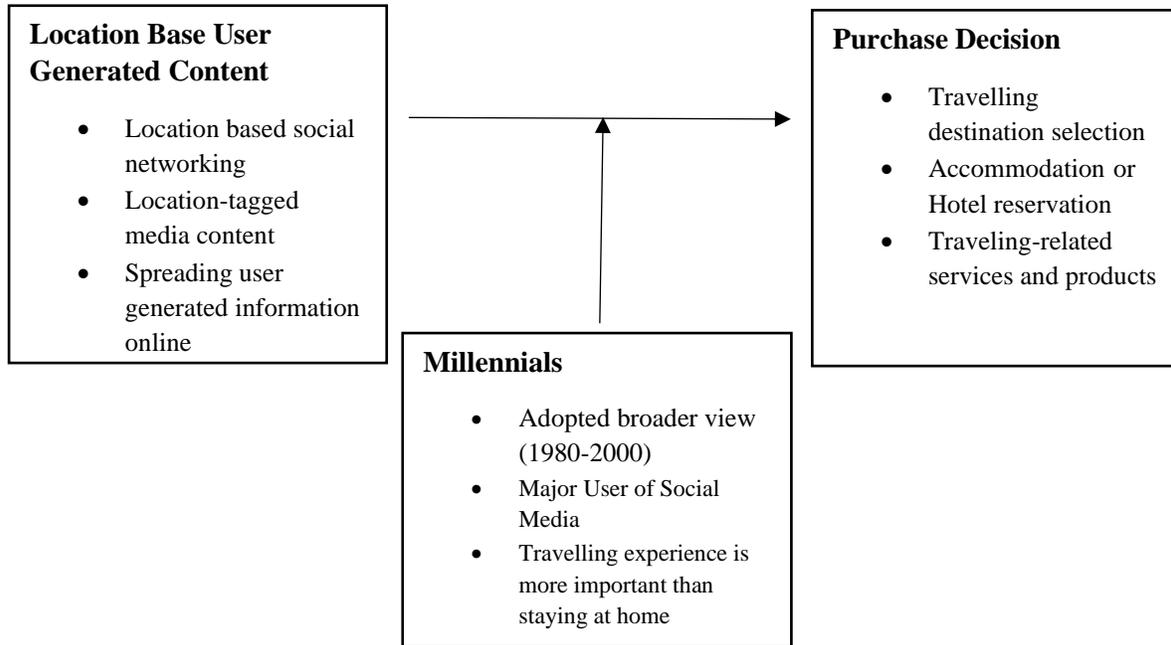
According to Smith (2011) millennials play a major role in the development and improvement of e-commerce, hence it is significant to study millennial advertising strategies resulting in a broader awareness for the need of personalization of advertising messages and approaches to delivering those messages. Airbnb and the Rise of Millennial Travel, (2016) claims that "Millennials are the largest generation in history, and by 2025, Millennials and younger generations will account for 75 percent of all consumers and travellers" Furthermore, Mya (2017) stated that "the United Nations estimated that 20 percent of all international travellers are Millennials, comprising approximately of 200 million people". Airbnb Millennials study mentioned that travel is more important than staying home as generation experience is paramount to the Millennial (Airbnb and the Rise of Millennial Travel, 2016). Thus, researchers conclude that traveling is essentially important for millennials, further millennials are major viewer of location based user-generated content which has effect on their traveling decisions. Moreover, location based user-generated content is specifically beneficial for millennials in a way that they are always looking for something new when they travel adventurous, local, and personal. Hence, researchers incorporate millennials as moderator variable proposed conceptual model.

CONCEPTUALIZATION OF FRAMEWORK

Based on the discussion above and consideration of the literature review aligned with research objectives and research questions of this study, the conceptual framework is developed (See figure 1). The proposed conceptual framework embraces one independent variable, i.e. location base user-generated content and one dependent variable i.e. traveller decision as well as moderator variable i.e. millennials since the generation Y is the most popular technology orientation generation who spend substantial time on social media network as well as on travel. The model was developed to conceptualize the relationship between user-generated content and traveller decision of millennial generation.

Previous studies have indicated that the user-generated content is linked with traveller decision. Furthermore, previous studies also indicated the importance of user generated content on traveller overall decision making, however, as per researcher knowledge, there is no study exist that investigated the effect of location base user generated content on traveller decisions based on millennial generation. Hence, this study conceptualizes the relationship of location base user generated content with traveller's decision.

Figure 1: Research Conceptual Framework

Location Base User Generated Content • Location based social networking • Location-tagged media content • Spreading user generated information online	**Purchase Decision** • Travelling destination selection • Accommodation or Hotel reservation • Traveling-related services and products

Millennials

• Adopted broader view (1980-2000)
• Major User of Social Media
• Travelling experience is more important than staying at home

Therefore, in light of the studies discuss in literature review, this research has proposed the conceptual framework of this research study, illustrated in Figure 1. It can be easily observed from the conceptual framework that the researcher intends to concentrate on examining the effect of user-generated content on traveller decisions. Previously, many types of research have been conducted on social media content, however, there is no research conducted yet which examine the effect of location based social networking user-generated content on traveller decision. Hence, it is very substantial to find what form of relationship actually exists in this framework.

PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

On basis of review of literature, a good review on location-based social network which is written by a user who had visited the specific place can always influence a tourist to include that place in his bucket list. However significant parameters should be taken into an account to define a good review. Travel and tourism companies can utilize user generated content to create 'value of money' or 'culture and traditions' which is indeed necessary to take a look for running a good business. Tourists are adventure driven people they can be more open to change their opinions if they offer good 'value of money, cultural destination or activity place which should be taken into business. Travel and tourism business should make a good profile on popular location based social networks like 'trip advisor', 'foursquare' so the tourist and especially millennial which is more technology driven generation can spot the place according to their interests and a business should find a way to improve reviews on location based networks platforms which can attract more tourist and leads

to more business. Additionally, to utilize location base user generated content as valuable as possible, it is also important to incorporate customer feedback into their practices.

THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS

In this study, uses and gratification theory provide theoretical foundation to proposed conceptual framework. The importance of user-generated content has induced numerous researchers to conduct research on different aspects of social media networking and how it can be connected to business. Although a number of researches have conducted on user-generated content and traveller decision, however, there is no empirical study conducted which investigates the effect of location based user-generated content on traveller decisions with moderator variable millennials. Thus, this study contributes to the literature through proposition development which enables travel and tourism stakeholders to enhance the quality of traveller decisions through location base user generated content.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

This study suggests a few policy implications for travel and tourism organizations; first, organizations need to make policy to create transparency in visitor reviews since a user who had visited the specific place can always influence new visitors. Secondly, travel and tourism organizations need to make policy regarding online profile building or branding, online public interaction, provide discount base on online customer recommendation, and incorporate customer feedback in their policy making. This study also recommends policy implication for regulatory institution as the data from location-based social networks can be used as a source for calculation of metrics and indexes supporting urban planning and decision making in cities and creating new tourist spots.

CONCLUSION

Stakeholders in travel and tourism industry are striving to improve the pleasure and convince of tourists in all possible ways. Earlier research studies provide the significance of user-generated content on traveller decisions though no study was conducted to investigate the effect of location base user-generated content and recommendation on travellers' decisions. Hence, on the basis of brief literature review researchers aims to highlight the importance of location based user-generated content and its effect on traveller purchase decision. However, the empirical evidence is still required to prove this contention statistically. Moreover, researchers suggested millennials as a social lab for the study, who are major users of internet and account for 75 percent of travellers in the world. Hence, the proposed conceptual framework would empirically be tested, by collecting primary data through a self-administered survey, from the defined social lab.

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