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ADVANCES IN GLOBAL SERVICES AND RETAIL MANAGEMENT

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Social Media Marketing in Rural Hospitality and Tourism Destination Research

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Abstract

An increasing number of studies have been dedicated to the application of social media in the marketing of hospitality services and tourism destinations. However, there exists a lack of extant literature dedicated to exploring how social media can be used in the marketing of hospitality and tourism in rural destinations. In order to achieve the objectives of this paper, the methodology adopted, and samples used for the analysis of literature review composed of relevant papers published in hospitality and tourism journals on social media framework, social media marketing (SMM), rural hospitality and tourism (RHT) destinations. These existing literature works were reviewed, and content analysed. Findings indicate the roles of SMM in the pre-travelling, during-travelling, and post-travelling stages of the tourists' travel planning activities. Eight social media tools were identified for the marketing of RHT destinations. Findings also show lack of internet infrastructure, dedicated mobile apps and website as challenges of adopting SMM in the promotion of RHT offerings by the destination's management and marketing organisations. Managerial implications suggest that social media will play important roles in the repositioning of hospitality and tourism in rural areas now and in post COVID-19 pandemic and new normal era. Theoretical implications and direction for future research are discussed.

Keywords: social media marketing, hospitality, rural tourism, social media tools, web 2.0

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Introduction

Academic discourse on the increasing role of social media in hospitality and tourism has become an emerging research interest (Zeng & Gerritsen, 2014). Over the years, there have been several views about the meaning of social media among practitioners and academics. According to Gretzel and Yoo (2014), social media is described as “a collection of technological applications and platforms that were originally designed to support social interactions among individuals”. Cohen (2011) presents 30 different definitions of social media from several viewpoints. Notably, some important features of social media have been clearly highlighted in Cohen's definitions. These include: (a) social media is the use of web-based and mobile technologies to turn communication into interactive dialogue; (b) social media link users to form a virtual community by using cross-platforms, and therefore impacts people's orientation and real life behaviours; (c) social media is a new marketing tool that allows you to get to know your customers and prospects in ways that were previously not possible; and (d) social media are the platforms that enable the interactive web by engaging users to participate, comment on and create content as a means of communicating

their social graph, other users and public. Indeed, social media provides one-to-one, one-to-many and many-to-many communications.

Joo, Kim and Yang (2011) opined that the way businesses are conducted in the modern era has been revolutionized by social media. This is evident in the online business interactions and relationships among different stakeholders. Electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) is one of the strategic tools employed by social media to disseminate information (Goldenberg, Libai & Muller (2001). A review of the extant literature emphasises the pivotal role of social media in the marketing of tourism destinations (Kiral'ova & Paviliceka, 2015), and in hospitality performance (Kim, Lim, & Brymer, 2015). The significance of studying social media marketing in the rural context of hospitality and tourism is because of the emergence of disruptive digital innovation, and global challenges of travel restrictions to tourism destinations and unknown rural places are not exempted. Notably, literature sources indicate there exists a lack of academic interest specifically in the adoption of social media marketing for the promotion of hospitality and tourism services in rural destinations. For example, the social media marketing is gaining interest in all industries; however, evidence from extant studies show that there are few literature sources about marketing of rural tourism using social media (Seth & Tripathi, 2020).

This study is positioned to uncover the extent of the gap in the literature. Therefore, the aims of this paper are from three perspectives: (a) to uncover the roles of social media marketing (SMM) in rural hospitality and tourism destinations; (b) to identify the suitable (or appropriate) social media tools for marketing hospitality and tourism destinations; and (c) to identify the challenges of adopting social media marketing in rural hospitality and tourism destinations. In order to achieve the set aims and interest of this paper, three research questions are considered: (a) What are the roles of social media marketing in rural hospitality and tourism destinations? (b) What are the suitable (or appropriate) social media tools in marketing hospitality and tourism destinations?; and (c) What are the challenges of adopting social media marketing in rural hospitality and tourism destinations? These questions provide a research setting for the critical review of previous studies on social media marketing in hospitality and tourism services, and in particular from the context of rural places.

Literature Review

Rural Destination and Social Media Marketing Research Gap in RHT

The origins of rural tourism according to Nulty (2004), can be traced to the rapid industrialization and urban development, improved and affordable transportation systems of Western countries. The concept of rural tourism embraces a number of constituent elements, at the heart of which lie the rural tourism community (UNWTO, 2004). Rural tourism is dependent on the countryside which an area has to offer, its heritage and culture, rural activities and rural life (Nulty, 2004). Rural tourism has been described as tourism taking place in the county side that showcases the rural lifestyle, art, history, norms, storytelling, culture and heritage at rural spaces (Aref & Gill, 2009). In rural space, authenticity is a key asset for any rural tourism activities (Frisvoll, 2013). Over the years, tourism is used as a tool to develop national, regional and rural areas economies (Sharpley, 2002). This notion is corroborated by Verma (2008) that rural tourism is often used as a strategy to promote economic development in rural areas especially where income generated from agricultural activities have been declined over time.

Rural hospitality and tourism are not a newfound research interest among the academics because tourists have always been attracted to visit rural destinations (Alexander & McKenna, 1998; Lane, 2009). Due to common features of rural destinations in terms of similarities in assets such as heritage, culture, food and landscape, there is a lack of distinct differentiation among rural tourism destinations (Haven-Tang & Sedgley, 2014). In this circumstance, it has been identified that a common problem of tourism development and marketing in rural destinations is its limited drawing power (CAI, 2002), and ability to compete with urban and well-known tourism destinations. Cai (2002, p. 738) mentions that “individual rural destinations are often too small to form a critical mass required of a primary destination”. In hospitality and tourism services, social media has attracted academic interest as an emerging research field (Zeng & Gerritsen, 2014). This view is consistent with Leung, Law, Hoof and Buhalis (2013) that it was only recently that social media in hospitality and tourism had been featured in academic journals. In most destinations, the existing destination management and marketing organisations (DMMOs) at the national, state and regional levels are saddled with the responsibilities of marketing their destinations such as a country, state (region, province, territory), town and rural destinations. This view agrees with Pike (2008) that regional tourism organisations are often responsible for the marketing of destinations such as cities, towns, villages, coastal resort areas, islands and rural areas. It should be noted that there is a lack of adequate coverage and focus on how these multiple destinations should be marketed and promoted effectively.

The adoption of social media marketing in modern business has turned the world into a global village. In view of the over 2 million tourism destinations across the globe (Balakrishnan, 2008), it has become increasingly difficult for DMMOs to use their limited budget to promote rural areas. On top of that, most hospitality and tourism studies are conducted in urban, popular and most visited destinations. Based on this premise, there is a dearth of academic research that has been dedicated to exploring how social media can be used in the marketing and the promotion of hospitality and tourism, especially in rural destinations. Hence, this paper aims to shed more light on social media praxis from the context of rural places because of the opportunities provided by social media in destinations marketing (Kiral’ova & Pavlicecka, 2015), and in hospitality business performance (Kim et al., 2015).

World Wide Web and Web 2.0 – The Genesis of Social Media

The World Wide Web (WWW) has impacted every facet of our lives from individuals, businesses and in government institutions (Gunelius, 2011). Social media has been described as a collection of online platforms and tools that people use to share content, profiles, experiences, insights, opinions, perspectives, and media itself, facilitating conversations online between groups of people (Cohen, 2011). At the outset, the WWW had attracted attention from individuals and organisations, but its adoption was limited. However, the application of Web witnessed a dramatic change when its usage changed from a traditionally navigational tool to a transactional tool where people could make purchases through the internet (Gunelius, 2011). Interestingly, the new generation Web developed into a social medium, and user-generated content (UGC) came into existence. The new generation of the internet became known as social web or web 2.0. Gillin (2007) describes Web 2.0 as internet technology and applications that help users to be involved in creating and distributing web content. Internet and web have always been focused on content creation and sharing.

The adoption of Web 2.0 technologies such as Ajax, RSS, API, mashups, and XML to mention a few make it easier for data to be exchanged or shared (Gretzel & Yoo, 2014). Notably, Web 2.0 is also viewed as a technologically base that includes programming languages and protocols that provide the needed infrastructure to ensure participatory attribute of the Web, in particular the social media support the channels through which content is created and shared (Gretzel & Yoo, 2014). Social media is an extension of Web 2.0 which allows inclusion of user-generated content in contrast to the static format of Web 1.0 (Hays, Page, & Buhalis, 2013). Thus, Social Web includes technologies, contents and connections. As such, social media are basically Web-based applications rooted and built on the technical and philosophical foundations of Web 2.0 that makes it easier to develop and transmit content (Safko & Brake, 2009; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). It is important to emphasise that the pictures, videos, audio files, and text created and shared using the social media are known as user-generated content [UGC] (Gillin, 2007), or consumer-generated media (CGM).

Social Media, Social Networking and User-Generated Content

The growth and global adoption of social media have changed the manner in which people relate with each other and conduct business (Pucciarelli, 2018). On the other hand, social networking is the act of connecting on social media platforms (Cohen, 2011). Social media was originally conceived as an avenue where individuals could engage in conversations and share information. However, commercial activities were integrated into social media which has gained acceptance and is becoming dominant in the global marketing place (Holt, 2016). Social media is an important internet platform that is growing and contributing to business marketing strategies (Kim et al., 2015) and social networking. It is important to make a distinction between social media and social networking. Social media are viewed as the “tools” or “means” of communication”, allowing one to reach and communicate, interact and influence the publics; while social networking is described as the application of “social media tools” (e.g. Facebook, You tube, Twitter, Whatsapp, Instagram amongst others) to interact and communicate directly with people you are connected with or with those whom will be likely connected or followers (Campbell, Lambright, & Wells, 2014).

Social networking is also described as an online service, platform, or site that is aimed at promoting and developing social relations among individuals who share common interests, activities, events, or real-life (Wikipedia, 2013). Zeng and Gerritsen (2014), posit that social media notable sites include consumer review site, wikis, internet forums, location-based, and social network sites. In this sense, social media has become a medium of connecting people socially, through the integration of information, mobile and web-based technologies, social interactions, videos and audio pictures, and constructions of words. Academic interests are emerging on steps for developing social media strategies (Bae & Muhammad, 2018). To sum up, ‘social media is a broad term used to describe websites that connect individuals based on one or more similarities or interests’ (Rishi & Bandyopadhyay, 2018). At this juncture, it is important to identify different categories of social media in business sectors and in the hospitality and tourism services.

Categories of Social Media Tools

There are various categories of social media identified by scholars in recent years. For example, Nicholas and Rowlands (2011) divided social media tools into eight categories: microblogging, social networking, social tagging and bookmarking, conferencing, video sharing, blogging,

collaborating authoring, scheduling and meeting tools. According to Tenopir, Volentine and King (2013), they suggest that social media can be categorised into six namely: blogs, RSS feeds, Twitter feeds, videos/YouTube, podcasts and others. Moreover, Gu and Widen-Wulff (2010) suggest that social media can be divided into eight different scholarly communication categories namely: blogs, mini blogs, wikis, RSS, tagging, social networks, online documents and multimedia sharing. Importantly, the following examples are connected to these categories such as: blogs, Twitter, Facebook, Pinterest, YouTube, Instagram, online videos, social networks, internet forums and other online and electronic tools. The different social media types provide opportunity for the kind of content that can be developed and shared among the users (Gretzel & Yoo, 2014). The various categories of social media connote different terms to people and attract a spectrum of components in the society in terms of cultures and business orientation (Gretzel, Fesenmaier, Lee, & Tussyadiah, 2011). In the modern enterprise, social media categories provide businesses and marketers with several options in promoting and obtaining marketing intelligence about their products and services (Gretzel et al., 2011), in particular the emergence of social media marketing, making it imperative to undertake an overview of social media marketing discourse from the hospitality and tourism destination context and relevant underlying theories.

Underpinning Theories

A number of theories have been developed for social media terminology by several scholars. However, in this study the focus will be on theories of media richness, social presence, and social processes (i.e. self-presentation and self-disclosure) by Kaplan and Haenlein (2010). The theory of media richness postulates that the purpose of any communication is the “resolution of ambiguity and the reduction of uncertainty” (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010, p. 61). Besides that, the degree of media richness which could impact on the effectiveness of media communication compared with others differ. According to Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) the theory of social presence suggests that the higher the degree of social presence, then the greater social influence communicators would have on one another’s behaviour. In addition, the theory of social process is important because virtual worlds allow for high levels of self-presentation and self-disclosure. From the perspective of a virtual world the user can mimic the face-to-face-world (Lange-Faria & Elliot, 2012). Building on the existing theoretical framework on web-based technology, social media marketing has changed the way businesses interact and communicate with the consumers (Vize & Sherrett, 2018). Since the advent of the internet, SMM has had one of the most transformational impacts of web-based technology on organisations (Dou, Niculescu, & Wu, 2013). In contemporary business organisations, it is no longer an option to invest in a website for both small and large organisations (Gunelius, 2011), and by extension hospitality entities and tourism destinations. Marketing activities and strategies that were predominantly and previously using a traditional website must take into consideration and must be supported by utilisation of social media tools (Forbes, 2012). In this regard, Barefoot and Szabo (2010) has defined social media marketing (SMM) as the application of social media tools or channels to promote a company’s products and services, including hospitality and tourism destinations. Cohen (2011) suggests that social media marketing is the involvement of organisations in conversations, interactions and marketing engagements of customers in an authentic and transparent manner while developing business relationships. The focus of SMM is basically on traditional marketing approach but utilises a unique way of communicating and interacting with current and future customers (Gretzel & Yoo, 2014). Social media marketing is concerned more with the relationship building approach rather than the marketing mix of product, price, place and promotion (4Ps). This view is consistent with Birch

(2011) that SMM is primarily concerned with relationship, return on engagement, reach based on relevance, and reputation (4Rs) rather than the 4Ps of marketing. Social media marketing is all-encompassing and should not be used to replace the existing marketing approach but rather should be seen as a complementary to other marketing campaigns (Evans, 2008).

It should be noted that in SMM reputation management is very crucial. This is because opinions, comments, reviews and engagements are components of consumer-generated content, and as such SMM has similarities with public relations which are regarded as part of the promotional mix or integrated marketing communication (Yoo & Gretzel, 2010). Social media marketing thrives on the relationship building concept; therefore, in order to achieve this goal, marketers should be proactive in engaging social media users by developing strategies of developing and influencing conversations (Mangold & Faulds, 2009). Social media marketing has been widely used in business-to-customer (B2C) perspective and is growing in business-to-business (B2B) context (Swani, Brown, & Milne, 2014). Most organisations have adopted SMM to increase exposure to their products and services, improve traffic to their websites, sales and minimise marketing expenditure and develop loyal customers (Beqiri, 2015). The digitisation of global economies is not limited to companies' communication and marketing strategies in presenting their products and services to the existing and potential customers, but there has been an extension of internet and web technology driven marketing efforts in hospitality and tourism destinations. Hence, it is important to understand the role and benefits of SMM from a business perspective (Vize & Sherrett, 2018), in particular in the context of an 'experience economy' such as hospitality, events and tourism.

Methods

Sample

The samples used for the analysis of literature review composed of relevant papers published in hospitality and tourism journals on social media in hospitality and tourism services, and social media marketing until the end of December 2020. From October 2017 to April 2021 we searched the following data bases including EBSCOHost, Science Direct, Web of Science, Proquest and Scopus and one search engine Google Scholar. These represent the largest online data bases and search engines (Buhalis & Law, 2008; Kim & Law, 2015). This study followed similar studies by Zeng and Gerritsen (2014), Kim and Law (2015), and Law, Chan, and Wang (2018) that have used different data bases to explore data. In addition, all the papers published in tourism and hospitality journals and included in the Australian Business Deans Council (ABDC) journal quality list were reviewed and taken into cognisance. The reason for the inclusion of the ABDC journal list lies on the fact that this list is more detailed than other ranking systems. Indeed, other ranking systems, such as SSCI, ABS, and Scopus, include a minimal number of hospitality and tourism journals compared to the ABDC list (Mura & Pahlevian Sharif, 2015, 2016). More specifically, the ABDC list includes 61 tourism and hospitality journals, a quantity higher than SSCI 18 journals, ABS 24 journals, and Scopus 43 journals (Mura & Pahlevian Sharif 2015, 2016). The selections of these journals were not limited to top journals. This is because social media marketing is an emerging academic research in the hospitality and tourism field (Zeng & Gerritsen, 2014; Leung et al., 2013).

Additionally, an edited book focusing on "Contemporary Issues in Social Media Marketing" (Rishi & Bandyopadhyay, 2018) was reviewed. The selection of the edited book is due to the fact that it

comprises the first book chapters on SMM academic research in the hospitality and tourism field. In this study convenience and purposive sampling methods were used. The selected journals in this study were accessible electronically except for the edited textbook which was available at the authors' affiliated university library shelf. A search was conducted using the keywords such as social media, web 1.0, 2.0, 3.0 and 4.0; social networking, user-generated content, social media marketing in hospitality and tourism, rural tourism, digital marketing and smart tourism. The analysis of keywords is consistent with previous studies in hospitality and tourism research where several keywords were considered. The extant literature includes content analysis in tourism (Camprubi & Coromina, 2016), social media in tourism and hospitality (Leung et al., 2013), social media in tourism (Zeng & Gerritsen, 2014), smart phones in hospitality and tourism marketing (Kim & Law, 2015), and mobile technology in hospitality and tourism (Law et al., 2018). However, it should be noted that book reviews, abstracts, editor prefaces, internet columns, conference papers, reports, commentaries, newspapers, government reports and editorial notes were excluded from this paper. This followed the suggestion by Jang and Park (2011) that the inclusion of these set of literature have limited contributions to the study of this nature as a result our main literature review is focused on extant journal articles. To sum up, one edited book chapter specifically on Social Media Marketing was reviewed and a total of 152 journals with 409 relevant articles were reviewed from the online database search for analysis as presented in Table 1.

Data Analysis

This study has adopted content analysis because it is suitable and widely used in social media marketing and mobile technology research in hospitality and tourism (Leung et al., 2013; Hays, Page, & Buhalis, 2013; Hall & Valentin, 2005; Kim & Law, 2015; Camprubi & Coromina, 2016; Law, Chan, & Wang, 2018). In addition, content analysis has been used to conduct research on written documents, audio tapes, human communication, photographs and video tapes (Berg, 2009). Content analysis is an observational research method or technique that is commonly used to systematically evaluate the symbolic content of all forms of recorded communications (Kolbe & Burnett, 1991). Content analysis is also seen as a careful, systematic and detailed investigation and interpretation of texts in an effort to identify patterns, themes, biases, and meaning (Berg, 2009). According to Elo and Kyngas (2008), content analysis is extremely useful when analysing different literature contents and large volumes of articles.

This study adopted the deductive approach because the researchers are interested in adapting existing concepts of social media marketing in a new context [i.e. rural hospitality and tourism destination] (Kim & Law, 2015). This approach is different from the inductive approach where it appears there are inadequate existing knowledge, unlike a deductive approach which is operationalized based on the existing theory (Elo & Kyngas, 2008). Coding and analysis of the selected literature was carried out considering the major keywords. Summative content analysis was adapted from Hsieh and Shannon (2005) to analyse the data. This is because this study begins with keywords which are clearly identified before and during data analysis. Additionally, these keywords were developed from review of literature.

In a nutshell, findings from data analysis can be linked back to the aims of the study. The purpose is to demonstrate how the aims of this study have been achieved. Notably, 855 "keyword" counts were identified and analysed accordingly in this study. Similar keywords were categorised and combined. This process is consistent with previous studies where similar keywords were merged

(Zeng & Gerritsen, 2014, p. 29; Camprubi & Coromina, 2016; Adeyinka-Ojo, 2018). On top of that, we intentionally conducted a review of top 10 social media tools in 2013 and 2017, and top 20 social media tools or platforms in 2018 to identify those that are suitable in the marketing of hospitality and tourism destinations.

Findings

The contents of the selected extant literature works presented in Table 1 were scrutinised to identify keywords. These keywords were highlighted in Table 2. This is necessary in order to identify the extent to which these keywords have been covered by existing studies. First of all, we found that “social media and social media marketing” were the most frequently occurring keyword, followed by “Web 1.0/2.0/3.0/4.0” as presented in Table 2.

Findings from the review suggest that social media marketing in rural hospitality and tourism destinations is lacking compared to urban and iconic hospitality and tourism destinations. Destination management and marketing organisations are yet to employ and utilise social media in the promotion and marketing of rural hospitality and tourism destinations. Table 3 presents categories of social media, examples and some of the applications by the tourists.

Table 1. Distribution of Book Chapter and Literature Review

Distribution of Book Chapter and Literature Review	No. of Chapters and Articles
Contemporary Issues in Social Media Marketing Book Chapter (Rishi and Bandyopadhyay, 2018)	22
Dedicated Journal of SMM (1)	
Journal of Digital and Social Media Marketing	177
Hospitality and Tourism Journals (23)	
International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management	7
International Journal of Hospitality Management	8
Cornell Hospitality Quarterly	4
Annals of Tourism Research	3
Tourism Management	11
Journal of Travel Research	2
Journal of Destination Marketing and Management	2
Current Issues in Tourism	5
Journal of Vacation Marketing	2
Journal of Hospitality and Tourism	2
Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Technology	8
Tourism Management Perspectives	10
Journal of Hospitality and Marketing Management	4
International Journal of Tourism Research	2
Tourism and Hospitality Management	2
E-review of Tourism Research	3
Journal of Travel and Tourism Marketing	12
Journal of Information Technology and Tourism	5
Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Research	3
Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management	2
Journal of China Tourism Research	2
Asia Pacific Journal of Tourism Research	2
Computers in Human Behaviour	3
Other journals (published one article each – 128)	128
Total (1+23+128 = 152 journals)	409

Table 2. Distribution of Keywords From Literature Review

Keywords	Frequency
Social media marketing	45
Social media	65
Social media platforms/tools	14
Social networking	25
Marketing/sales	35
Tourist attractions/appeal	13
Internet marketing	36
Digital marketing	41
Mobile technology/hospitality/tourism	24
Smart tourism	21
Smartphones/tourism/hospitality	19
Social media/tourism	37
Social media/destination marketing	29
Rural tourism/destination	42
Rural hospitality/tourism	28
Web 1.0/2.0/3.0/4.0	44
User-generated content	42
Content analysis	17
Word-of-mouth/e-Word-of-mouth	31
Mobile marketing	14
Tourist/visitor/guest	23
Consumer/buyer	26
Social networking sites	16
Blogs/microblogs/mini blogs/wikis/RSS/Hashtag	33
Virtual social worlds	15
Online marketing	19
B2B/B2C/C2C/P2P	38
4Ps/7Ps/4Rs	22
E-tourism marketing/strategies	15
Information/communication/technology	26
Social media marketing and rural tourism	01
Social media strategies	01
Total	857

Table 3. Categories of Social Media - Examples and Applications

Categories	Examples	Application
RSS	Twitter, Plurk	Rich Site Summary, Web feed, users are able to update online content in a PC readable format
Tagging (meta data)	Triple tags Hashtags # Knowledge tags	Keyword or term, allows tourists to easily find certain information about specific topics
Online Documents	User Guides Online help Quick reference	Documents on digital or analogue media or online forms, audio CDs, allows tourists to research real information to search about guides certain destinations online
Blogs	Personal blogs Blogosphere Microblogging Photoblog Vlog	Website, publish information, discussion over certain topics, allows tourists to leave online comments, reviews and feedback
Multimedia Sharing	File Sharing Photo sharing Social media Music piracy Reddit Video sharing Visual networking	A distribution practice, or providing access to digital media, allow tourists to get information from different countries which they have never been to via multimedia sharing or exchange
Mini Blogs	Twitter, Weibo Facebook, Tumblr	Broadcast medium, smaller content – short sentences, individual photos or video links
Wikis	Wikipedia BaiDu Baike	Website, allow users to edit and modify content and structure from the web browser
Social Networks	Facebook Twitter Pinterest Instagram Whatsapp Sina Weibo LinkedIn	Social structure like individuals or companies, social interactions – likes, comments and shares. Allows tourists to watch interesting videos, photos or reviews about certain destinations.

Roles of Social Media Marketing in Rural Hospitality and Tourism Destination

In providing answers to the first research question, findings indicate the roles of social media marketing can be viewed from customer and supplier dimensions as in depicted in Table 4 as follows.

Table 4. Roles of Social Media Marketing in Hospitality and Tourism Destinations

Dimensions	Citations	Components	Citations
Tourist (customer)	Litvin, Goldsmith, & Pan (2008)	*Pre-trip phase	Lee (2011); Fotis, Buhalis, & Rossides (2011); Xiang & Gretzel (2010)
		*During-trip phase	Lee, Xiong, & Hu (2012); Fotis, Buhalis, & Rossides (2011); Sparks & Browning (2011)
		*Post-trip phase	Yoo & Gretzel (2011); Scott & Orlikowski (2012); Huang, Basu, & Hsu (2010)
Service provider (supplier)	Carson & Sharma (2001)	*Promotion	Leung, Law, & Lee (2011); Huang (2011); Munar (2010); Wood (2009) Munar (2012)
		*Product distribution	Akehurst (2009); Noone, McGuire, & Rohlf's (2011)
		*Communication	Sigala (2011); Kim & Hardin (2010). Thevenot (2007)
		*Management	Leung, Law, & Lee (2011); Lee & Wicks (2010); Li & Wang (2011)
		*Research	Isacsson & Gretzel (2011); Kim & Hardin (2010); Stringam & Gerdes, (2010)

A discussion from the customer dimension include the pre-trip phase of travelling process triggered by need recognition and this is important to the customer (guest, visitor and tourist) for information search in terms of which destinations to visit (Yoo & Gretzel, 2011). This is followed by during-trip phase that is characterised by the impact of social media at the destination, evaluation of possible alternatives, and in particular customer buying decision (Leung et al., 2013). Next is the post-trip phase which deals with the post-buying behaviour of the customer travel planning activities (Yoo & Gretzel, 2011; Law et al., 2013). From the supplier dimension, there are five applications areas as presented in Table 5. For example, the use of social media is an important platform in the promotion of hospitality and tourism offerings by the suppliers [providers] (Barefoot & Szabo, 2010), and this is linked to mobile technology in hospitality and tourism (Law, Chan, & Wang, 2018). Likewise, supplier applies social media in the distribution of hospitality and tourism products and services in terms of online booking (Chan & Denizcl Guillet, 2011). Notably, social media tools are useful in facilitating communication among the actors – suppliers, customers and other stakeholders in hospitality and tourism destinations (Sigala, 2011).

The fourth component is focused on the social media applications for management spectrums such as training development for the employees, financial management, internal communication and engagement of external users of information (Leung et al., 2011) which can lead to hotels having higher occupancy rates if partner with mobile technology (Makki, Singh & Ozturk, 2016). More importantly is the social media application in conducting marketing research in hospitality and tourism related studies in identifying customers' needs, provision of memorable experience, new products and services development and improving internal knowledge. Previous studies suggest that social media application for research can be useful in customizing products and services that meet customers' needs (Isacsson & Gretzel, 2011; Kim & Hardin, 2010). It should be noted that these social media roles can be applied by both customers (consumers of hospitality and tourism products and services), and suppliers (providers of hospitality and tourism offerings) in rural hospitality and tourism destinations.

Suitability of Social Media Tools in Marketing Hospitality and Tourism Destinations

To address research question two, we explored the scale of social media users in order to identify which of the social media tools are suitable for the marketing of hospitality and tourism destinations. In particular, the researchers are also interested in establishing the most frequently used social media tools by the consumers for their travelling planning process. For example, the top ten social media tools and global users in 2013 are in the following order: Facebook, Google+, YouTube, Twitter, LinkedIn, Instagram, Pinterest, Myspace, Tumblr and Badoo (Bullas, 2003; Zeng & Gerritsen, 2014 p. 31). This is followed by the World Economic Forum (2017)'s report that the ten most popular social networks in 2017 are Facebook, WhatsApp, Facebook messenger, QQ, WeChat, Qzone, Instagram, Tumblr, Twitter, and Baidu Tieba. Findings also show that in 2018 the following are the top ten most popular social media sites. These include Facebook, YouTube, WhatsApp, Yahoo Messenger, WeChat, Instagram, QQ, Tumblr, Ozone, and Tik Tok (Lua, 2018). Based on the ranking of these social media tools, categories and examples of social networks, and applications presented in Table 4, there are eight social media tools which could be considered as suitable in marketing hospitality and tourism destinations. These social media tools are also appropriate in the rural hospitality and tourism destinations marketing and promotional efforts in terms of creating awareness, retaining and attracting potential tourists as presented in Table 5.

Table 5. Social Medial Tools for Rural Hospitality and Tourism Destination Marketing

Social media platform	Services
Facebook	Largest social networking site in the world – network with friends, or promote businesses, brands and products by using paid Facebook advertisements for rural hospitality and tourism destination.
YouTube	A video-sharing platform where users watch a billion hours of videos every day. Rural tourism activities can be uploaded.
Instagram	A social media platform that allows individuals to share a wide range of content such as photos, videos, stories, and live videos. Rural tourist operators can share tourism events on Instagram.
WhatsApp	A messaging app used by people in over 180 countries (Lua, 2018). It allows communication and the instant sharing of messages with individuals and groups.
Pinterest	A photo sharing and visual bookmarking social media site. It is a platform where people discover new things and be inspired, quite unlike most social media sites where engagement is the primary focus.
Google +	Google plus is a social networking service from Google. It enables users to organize people into groups for sharing across Google products and services. It allows sharing messages, photos, and videos, amongst others.
WeChat	WeChat is most popular in China and some parts of Asia. It grew from a messaging app into an all-in-one platform. Besides messaging and calling, users can now use WeChat to shop online and make payment offline, transfer money, make reservations, book taxis, and more.
QQ	An instant messaging platform that is extremely popular among young Chinese. QQ is used in 80 countries and also available in several languages. It also enables users to watch movies, play online games, shop online, blog, and make payment.

Challenges of Using Social Media Marketing in Rural Hospitality and Tourism Destinations

This section addresses research question number three concerning the challenges of adopting social media marketing in the context of rural destination. This study has uncovered several challenges of using social media for marketing hospitality and tourism services especially in rural destinations based on review of extant literature work as outlined in the following statements. There is a lack of awareness and citizen (local community and service providers) education of social media innovation in the marketing of rural hospitality and tourism services. Findings also

indicate lack of support by the destination management and marketing organisation (DMMO) saddled with the responsibilities of marketing rural tourism destinations. According to Adeyinka-Ojo (2018) skills deficits (skills needs) – digital and innovation skills, management skills, and leadership skills are needed in rural hospitality destination. Similarly, information and technological infrastructures are not in existence in most rural hospitality and tourism destination which includes broadband (high-speed internet access), and very small aperture terminal [VSAT] (Ng & Lien 2014, p.393). Furthermore, lack of supporting infrastructural facilities (amenities provided by the government e.g. electricity, good roads, water, safety and security); and superstructures [amenities provided by the private sector such as business and internet browsing centre, and technical support] (Haven-Tang & Sedgley, 2014).

This study also uncovered poor management of local community residents and rural hospitality and tourism service providers in terms of change management. Resistance to change drivers mainly from technological innovation and process reviews are not communicated and understood. Besides there is also lack of financial resources (Balakrishman, 2008) to acquire the new technology to support internet service, mobile apps development, website design and maintenance cost. Notably, political interference – local politicians hijacking the process of social media innovation for political campaigns at the grassroots for their personal gain instead of supporting the adoption of social media for marketing rural hospitality and tourism services (Pike, 2008; Leung et al., 2013). Moreover, there is a lack of existing framework to quantify the economic value and financial benefits of using social media marketing in rural hospitality and tourism business. Some of these findings seem similar with Ng and Lien (2014) on factors inhibiting the adoption of social media in hospitality industry. These include inadequate financial power, poor understanding of social media, absence of management support, resistance to change, poor infrastructure and technological knowledge, lack of evidence to support the gains of social media, and the fear of potential damage to brand reputation (Ng & Lien 2014).

In addition, most rural hospitality and tourism service providers were not connected to the internet where available, and there exists a lack of dedicated websites for hospitality and tourism offered by the rural communities. Besides that, where there is internet connection and websites, the appropriate social media platform to be adopted for social media marketing is not well understood by the destination marketers and rural hospitality and tourism entrepreneurs. Although social media tools such as Facebook, Instagram and YouTube were identified as widely used in social media marketing in hospitality and tourism destination. However, very few rural destinations have their own websites and mobile apps, and those who do have provide inadequate information for the visitors and these websites lack web quality index. Fernandez-Cavia, Rovira, Diaz-Luque and Cavaller (2014, pp.7-8) extended the existing seven parameters of analysing web quality such as home page, content amount and quality, information architecture, usability and accessibility, web positioning, marketing and interactivity. The additional five parameters developed by Fernandez et al. (2014) include languages, branding, discourse analysis, social web, and mobile communication. We reviewed the websites of rural hospitality and tourism destinations in Malaysia, Finland, United Kingdom and United States of America. These rural destination websites deviated from the 12 Web Quality Index (WQI) for tourist destination websites suggested by Fernandez-Cavia et al. (2014).

Conclusions

Implications

This study combines theoretical background studies on social media marketing, hospitality services, tourism products, tourist experience and rural tourism destinations. In particular, content analysis technique was adopted to systematically investigate and analyse the gap in the existing studies. The review findings suggest that social media marketing in rural hospitality and tourism is underutilized in several destinations by the destination marketers. The findings also indicate that most rural tourism destinations were not connected to the internet and lack dedicated websites for hospitality and tourism offerings by the host and rural communities.

Theoretical Implications

This study has uncovered that little or no study is focused on social media marketing from the context of rural hospitality and tourism destinations. This is a clarion call to academic researchers the need to reduce the gap in the extant literature work. Next, theoretical contribution suggests that the provision of internet infrastructure in rural destination by the DMMO is lacking, and this has hindered the application of appropriate social medial tools in promoting and positioning rural hospitality and tourism destinations during and envisaged post-pandemic years. This is important to increase the number of tourist arrivals and receipts due to deficits encountered in the during pandemic periods. It should be noted that increases in tourist arrival would trigger employment opportunity, development of local economy, destination awareness and building of destination branding.

Practical Implications

From the practical implications, destination social media marketers should be aware there are several suitable social media tools. However, this study has identified Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, Whatsapp, Pinterest, Google Plus, QQ and WeChat as the most suitable and relevant social media tools for marketing rural hospitality and tourism destinations. These social media tools provide unique services as presented in Table 5. In view of the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak which has affected hospitality and tourism industry and the new normal of social distancing practices. It is a global issue that the airline operations have been affected in terms of going concern and sustainability, with the envisaged attendant impacts on the number of tourist arrivals in post-COVID-19. Moreover, it is suggested that rural hospitality and tourism destination managers should develop sustainable strategies for the future of rural tourism. Social media will play important roles in the repositioning of tourism in rural areas now and in post COVID-19 pandemic periods through destination marketing communication. This contribution is supported by previous study that destination marketing communication is one of the roles of DMMOs (Adeyinka-Ojo, Khoo-Lattimore, & Nair, 2014).

Limitations and Future Research

It should be noted that this paper predominantly relies on systematic review of extant literature work on social media marketing paradigm, hospitality and tourism marketing from the context of rural destinations. In this sense, it is recommended that future studies should be focused on empirical studies from the stakeholders' perspective to uncover the role of social media marketing

praxis in promoting and positioning rural hospitality and tourism destinations. Future research should also look into the role of social media marketing and emerging social media tools suitable for digital rural tourism destination branding development. More importantly, future studies should review hospitality and rural tourism destination websites and compare the findings with the 12 WQI highlighted in this study. In conclusion, this paper has contributed to the scholarship of social media marketing from the context of rural hospitality services and tourism destination.

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