A Review of Social Media Marketing Activities in Promoting E-WOM and Enhancing Revisit Intention via Brand Image

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Abstract

Social media marketing has become very important in this era of social media for many scholars from various fields of study to investigate its effectiveness, as well as for marketers aiming to implement an effective marketing plan. However, there are few studies in the services literature, particularly in the Sabah tourism context, that have investigated the effectiveness of Social Media Marketing (SMM) Activities on tourist behaviors, although Sabah is one of the most visited states in Malaysia and among the major contributing industries to the Sabah income. Additionally, brand image plays an important role in tourism as it can affect a company's future revenue, long term fund, price sensitivity, affect decision making, stock prices, competitive advantage, and marketing achievement. Yet, the relationship between SMM activities and brand image remains hazy. Even though SMM activities is identified as an important factor in building a strong tourism brand image. Therefore, to clearly understand the relationship between these variables, this conceptual paper makes a review on the brand image as a mediator on the influence of SMM activities on tourist response particularly e-WOM and intention to revisit tourism provider social media

sites. This article adds to the expanding body of knowledge regarding social media marketing and customer behavior in developing countries by emphasizing the importance of every social media marketing activity in the tourism sector.

Keywords: Social media marketing, E-WOM, Revisit intention, Brand image, Tourism

1. Introduction

Studies on social media marketing are more relevant in this day than traditional media marketing or brick and mortar studies (Naylar et al., 2012; Asongu & Bo, 2018). Because of that, it has attracted many researchers from various fields of study to investigate the influence of marketing strategies on social media (Godey et al., 2016; Spackman & Larsen, 2017; Yadav & Rahman, 2018; Ibrahim & Aljarah, 2018; Taskin & Alkaya, 2017; Seo & Park, 2018; Koay et al., 2020; Ibrahim et al., 2021; Chee & Winnie, 2022).

The tourism industry is one of the industries that rely heavily on social media marketing (Zeng & Gerittsen, 2014), as social media is considered an ideal medium to be applied in the tourism marketing strategy due to the nature of tourism product itself; that is perceived as high risk and intangible since the quality of the service can only be measured after consumption.

Aside from that, social media marketing is essential because it provides more information and reduces tourist risk before making a final decision (Gretzel & Yoo, 2013; Sano, 2014; Sirikaya & Woodside, 2005; Bickart & Schindler, 2001; Pitta & Fowler, 2005; Buhalis & Cobanoglu, 2014). Furthermore, from the standpoint of the services literature, the study of social media marketing will remain relevant because continuous changes in internet technology will always influence consumer behaviors (Dwivedi et al., 2020).

Other than that, the tourism sector to be found highly depends on strong brand image creation on consumers as a strong brand image can contribute to favourable customer response. Bruhn et al. (2012) state marketers need to position their services properly in the mind of the customers through social media. Meanwhile, Seo and Park (2018) examined the impact of social media marketing on customer response through the lens of brand image. It was discovered that brand image mediates the relationship between social media marketing activities and has a strong influence on customer response.

Despite its greater impact on customer response, there has been little research into the role of brand image as a mediator between social media marketing and customer behaviour, particularly in terms of e-WOM and revisit intention (Ibrahim et al., 2021; Chee & Winnie, 2022). The e-WOM is perceived as an important marketing tool in tourism (Nuseir, 2019) and Seo and Park (2018) investigated the impact of social media marketing on brand equity and customer response in the airline industry. They discovered that brand image has a greater impact on e-WOM and conclude that marketers can exploit e-WOM on their brand's advertisement continuously through social media by enhancing their brand image. Whereas revisit intention can be used as an indicator if marketing strategy on social media has been effectively implemented or vice versa (Ibrahim et al., 2021).

Meanwhile, in the context of Malaysian tourism, there is no clear indication to what extent does social media marketing activities influence tourist behavior in terms of e-WOM and revisit intention. The topic is important to be investigated and this is supported by several researchers conducted abroad such as Godey et al. (2016), Tan et al. (2018), and Dwivedi et al. (2020) who highlighted the importance of this investigation especially in developing countries. Therefore, this article proposes a conceptual framework to comprehend the relationship between social media marketing activities and tourist e-WOM and revisit intention using brand image as a mediator variable.

To this end, the following article is divided into four sections. The following section expands on the proposed predictors for tourism social media marketing activities, including revisit intention and e-WOM. Section 3 contains the proposed conceptual framework and related propositions. Finally, in section 4, this article concludes with conclusions and recommendations for future research.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Social Media Marketing Activities (SMMA)

There are numerous definitions of social media marketing in various types of literature, and in this study, social media marketing is defined as the process of promoting websites, products, and services through online social channels. It entails marketing-related activities such as blogging, photo sharing, and online posting (Yazdanparast et al., 2016). From this definition, we can understand that several marketing activities dimension are involved. In the literature, the most common dimension studied in social media marketing is entertainment, interaction, trendiness, perceived risk and customization.

But, in this conceptual paper, one additional social media marketing activity dimension are added, namely the feedback. The entertainment dimension is defined as a result of fun and play that is experienced by customers when using social media (Agichtein et al., 2008). Interaction is another important aspect of social media marketing activities. It is considered as the sharing of information or photo (Harrigan et al., 2017), which in turn, businesses can build and enhance their relationship with their customer (Samala et al., 2019). Meanwhile, trendiness refers to providing the most up-to-date information about products or services (Godey et al., 2016).

Feedback is a relatively new aspect of social media marketing activity. Feedback can be considered as a review or opinion written about tourism providers on social media by tourists that reflects how satisfied are they with the services or product after experiencing or consumed it (Liu & Park, 2014). Feedback is a dimension that is considered crucial for tourism because it can influence potential customer behavioural intention (Erkan & Evans, 2016). Apart from that, perceived risk dimension has also not been widely proposed in the previous studies on social media marketing activities. It represents how company provide enough information in the perspective of customer and can relives customer anxiety as purchasing an intangible product like services on the media social (Sano, 2014).

Another aspect of social media marketing activity is customization, which is defined as the

ability of a service to be tailored to the preferences of the customer (Godey et al., 2016; Kim & Ko, 2012; Zhu & Chen, 2015). Hence, the current article proposes social media marketing activities, consisting of entertainment, interaction, trendiness, perceived risk, feedback, and customization dimensions as the independent variables for the proposed framework.

2.2 Brand Image

Brand image is the brand position formed in the minds of customers as a result of experiences or perceptions formed during the communication process (Bilgin, 2018; Lee et al., 2019). Then, the influence of experiences or perceptions present in the minds of consumers can determine the response of either positive or negative behaviors or attitudes towards the brand (Chakraborty & Biswal, 2020).

Thus, in social media marketing strategy, brand image has been recognized as an important tool in developing strong brand equity (Godey et al., 2016) as a company's future profits, long-term cash flow, consumer willingness to pay premium prices, decision making, stock prices, sustainable competitive advantage, and marketing success can all be influenced by strong brand equity. (Yoo & Donthu, 2001). As a result, many academics are interested in the concept of brand image, particularly in industries that provide unique products and services, such as tourism (Bruhn et al., 2012).

However, in service literature particularly in tourism, there is still a need for further understanding of the relationship between SMM activity and brand image. Several findings are found to be contradicted regarding the relationship of these variables. For example, Barreda et al. (2020), who conducted a study in the United State found that an increased in SMM activities greatly influenced the positioning of brand image in customer mind.

In contrast, Bilgin (2018) who conducted a study in Turkey argued that to build a strong brand image, SMM activities must be integrated with traditional media marketing. Yet in other studies conducted in the context of Malaysian tourism, an understanding of the role of brand image in SMM is necessary (Ramli et al., 2014; Tan et al., 2018). Therefore, the inclusion of brand image in the current study to understand its role in the context of Malaysian tourism is considered justifiable.

2.3 E-Words of Mouth (E-WOM)

With the introduction of social media and e-WOM communication, the internet's advancement has changed customer behaviour and user interaction (Dwivedi et al., 2020). In this study, e-WOM is perceived as a user response in willingness to share information, upload content, recommend and encourage to visit the brand social media, or opinions with friends, colleagues, and family on social media.

Based on previous studies, e -WOM is an effective marketing tool that greatly influences a person's purchasing decision (Ladhari & Michaud, 2015; Hua et al., 2017; Boon-Loong & Wongsurawat, 2015; Di Pietro, 2012). Because of that, e-WOM can be used by marketers to learn more about their customers, and as a result can effectively improve their SMM activity strategies (Boon-Loong & Wongsurawat, 2015).

From a social media marketing perspective, in a study conducted by Sano (2014) and Seo and Park (2018), it was found that there are differences in terms of information dissemination between Japanese and Korean. The Japanese are not favorable to share or recommend their experience to others on social media unless requested to make feedback by the travel company compared to Koreans which tends to express their opinion and feelings directly with others on social media. Consequently, Sano (2014) suggest there is need further research to test the behavior of spreading e-WOM in other countries.

In this regard as well, it demonstrates the importance of understanding customers in order to develop an effective social media marketing strategy. For that, e-WOM is included in the conceptual framework as a customer response behavior in the social media marketing environment.

2.3.1 Social Media Revisit Intention

In marketing research, many scholars have investigated the factors that influence the success of social media as a marketing strategy. However, according to Ibrahim et al. (2021), the success of social media marketing implementation is determined by the user's continued usage intention rather than the initial adoption. So, following Ibrahim & Aljarah (2018), this article conceptualizes social media reviewing intentions as a customer's likelihood to revisit social media.

Although the study of the customer's actual behaviour is more ideal than the study of the customer's intentional behaviour, and there have been many scholarly studies on it (Moroson, & Jeong, 2008; Cheung et al., 2020), from a social media perspective, there are still limited studies in explaining the relationship between revisiting intention with SMM (Dwivedi et al., 2020; Ibrahim et al., 2021). For this reason, the study of social media revisits intention is also included in the proposed model.

3. Proposed Conceptual Framework

As a result of the preceding discussion, a conceptual framework is developed and illustrated in Figure 1 to better understand the relationship between SMM, e-WOM, and revisit intention through brand image. This conceptual framework is built based on prior studies in social media marketing activities (Kim & Ko, 2012; Sano, 2014; Godey et al., 2016; Seo & Park, 2018; Ibrahim & Aljarah, 2018; Cheung et al., 2019; Koay et al., 2020; Ibrahim et al., 2021) and use Stimulus-Organism-Response (SOR) theory to support this integrative model (Jacoby, 2012). Stimulus refers to the factors that can affect a person's internal state, here is SMM activities (entertainment, interaction, trendiness, feedback, perceived risk, and customization). Meanwhile, organisms are defined as internal processes that act as intermediaries between stimuli and a person's final response, here is brand image. For response (Chang et al., 2011), here is e-WOM and revisit intention.

According to Godey et al. (2016), SMM becomes an important marketing tool in building a strong brand image. Similarly, further studies show that marketing activities on social media have a significant influence on consumer brand image (Bilgin, 2018; Seo & Park, 2018). This finding is supported by Sanny et al. (2020), who concluded that social media marketing

activities have an impact on brand image. Therefore, the following recommendations are developed:

Proposition 1: There is a positive relationship between social media marketing activities and brand image.
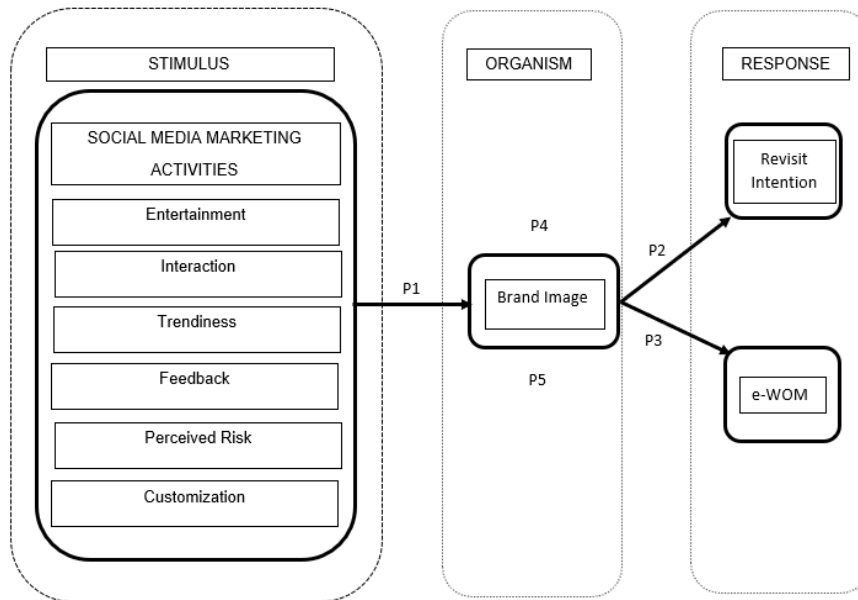

Figure 1. A proposed conceptual framework for social media marketing activities

A study by Cheung et al. (2020) found that the formed of brand image position on customer mind can influence consumer behavioural intention, in this study is revisit intention. This consistent with Assaker et al. (2011) which is had examined the influence of tourists' feelings, knowledge, and perception on the intention to revisit and it was found that these brand image attributes have a positive relationship with tourist's intention to revisit. In further studies, Afshardoost and Eshagi (2020) also found that consumer positive brand image has significant impact on tourist's behavioural intention. Hence, the following proposition is developed:

Proposition 2: There is a positive relationship between brand image and revisit intention.

In the airline industry, Seo & Park (2018) investigated the effects of social media marketing activities (SMMAs) on brand equity and customer response. The above study also examined the influences of brand image on e-WOM. It was found that brand image has a significant impact on e-WOM. Thus, the following proposition is developed:

Proposition 3: There is a positive relationship between brand image and e-WOM.

Kim and Ko (2012) analysed the relationship between social media marketing activities and behaviour intention in the luxury fashion brand. There is a significant positive relationship between social media marketing activities and behaviour intentions that is mediated by brand equity, according to the findings. Similarly, Doosti et al. (2016) also found that social media marketing activity (e-WOM) has a significantly greater influence on behaviour intention with

the brand image as the mediator.

Further research by Chakraborty and Biswal (2020) backs up the findings, revealing that brand image mediates the impact of social media marketing activity or review on consumer hotel booking intention. Hence, the following proposition developed:

Proposition 4: Brand image mediates the relationship between social media marketing activities and revisits intention.

Seo and Park (2018) discovered a significant relationship between social media marketing activities and e-WOM that is mediated by brand image, leading to the following proposition:

Proposition 5: Brand image mediates the relationship between social media marketing activities and e-WOM.

4. Conclusion

The proposed conceptual framework aims to understand the relationship between SMM activities, e-WOM, and revisit intention, where the proposed framework includes brand image as a mediator. It is expected that effective SMM activities enhance the brand image and as a result, it may contribute to positive e-WOM and revisit intention as the behavioural outcome.

This conceptual paper contributes to both theory and practice. Practically, this conceptual paper may be regarded as essential because it provides tourism marketers with an initial idea of the potential factors that could lead to the successful implementation of the social media marketing strategy. As mentioned by Denizci et al. (2011) that many service providers continue to misunderstand the meaning of social media marketing and only see it as a marketing tool. Social media marketing is more than just a marketing tool for disseminating and receiving information; it can also be a great way to build a good relationship with current and potential customers.

Thus, proper social media efforts should provide them with favourable returns in terms of future profits and long-term cash flow, stock prices, sustainable competitive advantage, and marketing success (Yoo & Dhontu, 2001). This can be done by employ a specialist who a responsible for social media marketing activities, handling professionally feedback on social media site, and proactively interact and encourage customer to share their video, photo or opinion on tourism provider social media site (Denizci et al., 2011).

Furthermore, tourism providers may benefit from lower advertising costs as a result of the elimination of a few advertising channels used in traditional marketing (Bruhn et al., 2012). Besides, tourism providers can learn more about their customers particularly in predicting their future customer behaviour and as a result, tourism providers can formulate an effective marketing strategy on social media (Sano, 2014; Ajanthan, 2017; Seo & Park, 2018).

Theoretically, this conceptual framework is novel in terms of comprehending SMM activities in the tourism industry. Though scholars have studied the role and impact of SMM, most have focused on branded products and apparel, with only a few studies conducted in the tourism

industry. Thus, the findings based on previous studies may not be suitable in the context of tourism as customer's perspectives are varied across industries. For example, reviewing feedbacks on social media may be less important when the customer purchases tangible products such as apparel in online stores compared to intangible products such as tour services in tourism provider social media sites. This is because when customers purchase an intangible product, they require detailed information and feedback (e.g., rating review) to reduce their anxiousness about purchasing an intangible product. This requires research on the effects of each social media marketing activity on brand image, which could provide a more detailed and meaningful conclusion. The conceptual framework could also be customized and tested with other social media marketing activities that could have an impact on the customer's brand image.

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