

INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN CHOOSING DOMESTIC TOURIST DESTINATIONS

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Abstract: This study examined the influence of social media in choosing domestic tourist destinations. 10 working professionals in Makati City were gathered as respondents for the Focused Group Discussion. The findings showed that the average frequency of travel by the respondents is 4 times in a year. This study used the concept of The Customer Journey to Online Purchase, a tool of Google Think Insights by Paul Muret, Director of Engineering of Google Analytics and further interpreted for travel and hospitality industry by Frederic Gonzalo and Push and Pull theory. Decision stage is the level in the decision making that has been taken much attention to and is very much influenced by social media and next is Consideration stage. Moreover, sightseeing variety is the most encouraging factor that pushes an individual to travel, next is seeking relaxation and fulfilling one's prestige while events and activities in a particular attraction effectively attract potential travelers to visit the place, next is because of great marketing efforts and the history and culture of the destination. The study contributed in careful assessment of decision-making and to precisely identify the purpose encouragement and reason of attraction.

Keywords: social media, decision-making, influence, purpose, travel, hospitality, customer, journey, online.

1. INTRODUCTION

Millennials were indeed in the middle of the up-rising drastic improvement use of technology for convenience. Most especially social media serves as a relevant tool in almost everyday life of any individual. What more for potential travelers who keep their selves updated and posted about emerging tourist trends, destinations, promos and any good catch for a well-deserved vacation or holiday.

According to Terol (2013), technology came up drastic difference with the means of how people travel, featuring the frequent use of smartphones with its connectivity and accessibility at any time whenever it is needed for tourists to make use of various platforms in arranging everything they need when travelling and eventually share their experience to make referrals to potential travelers as it reflects the reviews given and to produce posts of their own captured photos.

Surette (2015) stated that living within a technology-driven era, the so called new media is said to be as digital information that can be widely spread and talked about among frequent Internet users. New media experiences are said to be precise and closest depiction of actual experienced reality. It is seen as one's actual journey, all relevant happenings that occurred in one's life is considered as an experienced reality.

Maclang (2016) stated that with travelling, the usually famous and known sites or blogs that showcase tourist spots, accommodations and unique locations attract much more engagement than local marketed blogs. Those most talked about blogs receives a good number of followers as they show their experience, tips, the details and other more information about the place using their own point of view as their content. Because of this, potential travelers could come up with their

plan of choice. Nowadays, technology just keeps on improving and advancing where almost everything could be accessed easily which makes travelling easy with only a small effort of a few clicks. This is why everyone could travel whenever they want to.

According to Kazak (2016), the tourism industry nowadays has received a striking change from social media whereas the customers are relying on various platforms to discover new things about a specific destination. Most of the Millennials today tend to share everything online like travel experience, special moments of their lives and also they are sharing their experience in a hotel, restaurant, resorts, airline and etc. It has a different impact on the potential guests in the future. As it was posted online it plays an important role in tourism, like for example the information needed is already posted online, the search and destination-making behavior and tourism marketing activities. The social media is the extent of the word of mouth through Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat and etc. potential customers tend to trust the media if it has recommendations, opinions and comments from experienced travelers. Their decision making affects the individual. Social media is a powerful tool especially when it comes to tourism industry because when people shared a good experience about a place or destination some people also like to visit the said place to experience it.

Layug (2014) stated that, the use of social media must be known as more than just about interacting or creating bonds among different people but it is also a tool to promote brands to a mass of users that are taking it as a platform for promotion of various places or destinations. Whenever social media is put into use and certain places capture their attention, potential travelers are inspired to travel for leisure and fun. A noticeable impact to the economy development of tourism is positively seen through the works of social media, whereas the Philippines were able to be known around the world because of the preserved beauty mostly of natural resources through the wide use and influence of multimedia seen throughout the internet. And through it, a lot of destinations are identified to emerge in popularity.

Aside from being a source of informative trends, social media also contributes to the demands of the tourists and supply of resources where such destinations are exposed to the visitors and non-visitors through any internet sources whereas it can also be a medium for visitors or travelers to react, share their opinions and evaluate services from their trip (Királ'ová & Pavlíček, 2014).

Sharing of travel experiences and joyful stories during a trip is inevitable since a lot of travelers sees it as a mandatory action every after a trip. Therefore, as it reaches the World Wide Web, it can highly influence the decision-making of anyone who would be able to stumble upon it (Kang & Schuett, 2013).

Millennials tend to resort to easy ways to attain convenience, which is something that social media can provide. Things can only be a click away. Just like how flights can be booked online or purchasing tour packages through platforms like official websites, Facebook and may other sources online (Tran, 2018).

Scrolling through posts online about the destinations that frequent travelers have visited is entertaining but being able to experience it personally is a lot different (Saxena, 2016).

Fuggle (2015) stated that most of the Millennials nowadays are willing to splurge their income to nurture memories and experiences from the things that they do. They choose to spend it for things that they really know that will help them become a better individual. They believe that gaining experiences will help them have better opportunities.

It is very much noticeable that the use of internet took over the minds of the generation today. Most especially in the tourism industry, emerging tourist destinations are given much attention and marketed throughout various platforms that can indeed expose the beauty of a destination. As the public attention grows, the more people would look forward to witness the place personally in such a way that they will plan a trip or it can influence their decision-making in coming up with a vacation.

The study took place within the vicinity of Ayala Triangle Gardens at Makati City. It is considered to be the country's richest city with an urban lifestyle and affluence where many of the potential travelers may be located.

The concept used in this study is The Customer Journey to Online Purchase, a tool of Google Think Insights by Paul Muret, Director of Engineering of Google Analytics and further interpreted for travel and hospitality industry by Frederic Gonzalo. This tool also allows comparison of travel vertical focusing on media as it emphasizes on its four stages which are awareness, consideration, intent and decision.

Potential tourists' motivation to pursue a particular tourism experience can be classified through the use of Push and Pull theory, as it identifies that Push factors are those intangible desires that encourage tourists to do something away from home and be away from one's usual setting (Malra, 2016), while Pull factors are those tangible characteristics of a specific destination or unique events and activities which attracts the tourists to visit the place (Popp, 2013).

The said concept and theory were chosen because the proponents wanted to determine what encouraged and attracted potential travelers, as well as how they understand and use the information they come across on social media and how it affects their decision-making.

Awareness is where doing a research takes place. Before aiming for visiting a place, one must know what it looks like, how far or how long it takes to reach the destination, what are the places to be visited, what are the cultures and traditions being practiced and so on. This is also a stage where social media posts in particular happen to catch one's attention. Consideration is the second stage where the traveler is already aware; they are able to identify the kind of trip or activity that they are aiming for. Aside from being knowledgeable about the prospected destinations for their trip, a few cities or destinations should be taken into consideration where their desired trip or activity will take place.

Intent is the stage where the potential travelers would have to identify the date/s of their trip, as well as other relevant details just like the accommodation, tourist attractions, famous local restaurants and events if possible. Also, the intention of consulting family and friends or with the aid of travel agencies take place whether online or offline. And lastly, after carefully going through all the stages, this is when final transactions are done. The business could either be done through the supplier itself or having a third party alliance (Gonzalo, 2013).

Push factors may be identified through the following purposes:

In fulfilling one's prestige, it increases the social entitlement of an individual being able to stand out from the usual and common trips (Madzura, 2016). In seeking relaxation, career-minded individuals become potential tourists as they seek relaxation in between or after their stressful daily routines. They tend to crave physical relaxation, to be away from their usual setting, they seek different kind of thrill and excitement to feed their adrenaline and to try a new place that they haven't been to before. Those who are into the sightseeing variety, beautiful sceneries are indeed captivating and taking a photo could make the fascination to the eyes last longer which is also a reason why a lot of tourists would want to fulfill a dream of visiting a foreign land/country to sightsee or explore their local culture resources.

On the other hand, Pull factors may be identified through the following characteristics:

The memories made and being shared in a particular destination may be because of entertaining gatherings like festivals, events/nightlife and bonding activities for the whole family/group. Old structures that outstand in the scenery with significant stories to tell along with its unique culture can also be a motive of potential tourists in a particular destination. Also, through several ways of marketing efforts, it made images of a destination differ from others to showcase the strengths it can offer to tourists to satisfy their desires and wants. (Malra, 2016).

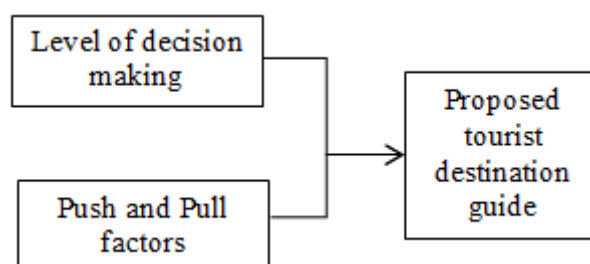


Figure 1: Research Paradigm

The push and pull factors identified here in the study will help emphasize the motivation of potential travelers and the Customer Journey to Online Purchase of Paul Muret will help reflect the potential travelers' level of decision making, as it will develop a proposed tourist destination guide.

The gap that the proponents put emphasis on was with the concept used in this study which is the Customer Journey to Online Purchase of Paul Muret and the use of Push and Pull theory to identify the purpose of travel with the decision making of the respondents in terms of travel and hospitality industry through the interpretation of Frederic Gonzalo. The

proponents recommended that their travel motivation should be clear whereas the four stages of decision-making that were discussed could serve as a guide and should be carefully gone through by any individual whom has the potential to travel since all the information are only based on the experience and feedback from experienced travelers, for it to result to a safe and successful planning of a trip to the destination that has been chosen.

The general objectives of this study was to identify what truly encouraged and attracted the potential tourists to visit domestic tourist destinations and examined how social media affects the decision-making of tourists in choosing places to visit.

The specific objective/problem of this study is the following:

1. How the respondents assess their level of decision making in terms of the following stages:

Awareness;

Consideration;

Intent; and

Decision

2. How do the respondents examine the Push and Pull of social media?

3. What proposed tourist destination guides can be developed?

2. METHODOLOGY

The study used a qualitative research design. The proponents chose this research design as it can emphasize on how potential travelers are intrinsically motivated and their preferences in domestic tourist destinations, as well as how frequent do they engage in social media, how they use the content it shares.

The participants of the study were Filipino professionals born in Generation X or so called The Millennials working in Makati City aging from 23 to 37 years old, having a sample size of 10 respondents. Non-probability sampling method whereas quota sampling is used which the study units involved were decided by the proponents.

The proponents were able to roam around Ayala Triangle Gardens, Makati City to invite respondents and asked them if they have time to participate in our research for a Focused Group Discussion composed of 10 people with proper filling of Consent Forms.

The appropriateness of the data gathering was based on the filled-out information and answers provided on the questionnaire, identity and personal information of the respondents are rest assured to be confidential within the proponents. The ethical consideration for this study is a Face Validity whereas we personally approached the respondents and the questionnaire was shown to the respondents as they fill up the consent form as a way of transparency.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The average frequency of travel by the respondents is 4 times in a year.

The first stage in the level of decision making is Awareness. The respondents were asked if any social media has ever helped them in planning their ideal vacation, what application is it in particular and if they share their experiences as well. All of the respondents answered yes and it is on Facebook.

The respondents were also asked if they are aware in visiting a destination because of its accessibility, whether if they want a long or short trip. As the girl, 25 years old said:

“Long trips, other beautiful places are too far from the city.”

Some tourist destinations that possess a preserved natural beauty can be quite far from the city since such locations like provinces are far from industrialization and city pollution. Moreover, if a tourist would travel a long way to cross a different city, it will always be worth the time. As (Bloom, 2016) quoted Katie Frederick Jacobson, a honeymoon planner and founder of Ever After Honeymoons said that traveling a long distance is very much rewarding as people would arrive to a beautiful and worthwhile destination.

The second stage in the level of decision making is Consideration. The respondents were also asked if they consider the price of the tour that they will be having and most of the answers are yes. As the girl, 23 years old said:

“Yes, if I think it is worth the money I invested for.”

Travelling does not mean spending a lot of money. One could always opt for a budget-friendly trip, as long it will satisfy one’s purpose for going on a vacation. (Perko, 2015) stated that a traveler does not need too much effort on having a worthwhile vacation, one just have to go beyond in seeing what a certain destination can offer, be able to experience the culture and traditions, know about its history, enjoy the local cuisines and have a good place to stay in to look forward for the next adventure.

The third stage in the level of decision making is Intent. The respondents were also asked if they are immediately encouraged to visit a tourist attraction whenever they see friends or family post about it online and if they intently ask them right away regarding their experience. As the girl, 24 years old said:

“Yes, when they give good reviews, it makes me want to experience it too.”

Millennials today is involved in the use of technology, internet and smartphones which are made for everyone’s convenience and to gain resources as an aid in planning and preparing for vacations. (Carter, 2017) stated that according to research, there is a great impact in travel plans through the use of social media whereas for example, 52% of Facebook users are said to be influenced by their friend’s post regarding their own trip. Social media can also be used a tool to connect not just with people but also with travel brands, this can be a good bridge for travelers to inquire about a certain destination and share their opinions, experiences and things for improvement. Also, at the end of the vacation, seeing feedback from the people you may know is a great factor to be considered to apply in planning one’s own trip.

The last stage in the level of decision making is decision. The respondents were asked if travel reviews really helps them in choosing domestic tourist destination and what they consider when choosing a local destination. As Respondent 5 said:

“Yes, accommodation, activities, food and environment.”

A lot of people consider the recommendations made by the other people on the different websites, leaving real based comments from their experience (Hanratty, 2015). This will help to make sure that the potential traveler will meet his/her expectations in the destination that they will visit.

The respondents were asked if they have been into unique and new places that their family and friends haven’t visited yet to fulfill one’s prestige. 8 respondents agreed that they have been to it. Where in respondent 4 said that:

“Yes, the feelings when I share it to my friends it is fulfilling.”

Visiting new places will make a person happy in a way that the potential traveler will experience new culture, surrounding and tradition. (Hutcherson, 2018). Being able to interact with others will give you a knowledge about the things that they are used to do.

The second factor is the seeking relaxation where respondents are asked if they want to travel after a stressful work. Where respondent 8 said:

“Yes somewhere peaceful and full of nature like Palawan.”

Relaxation is one of the effective ways to reduce the stress that individuals encounter especially if it involves nature interaction (Khan, 2017). Interacting with the nature helps to boost our mood, which helps us to recover quickly.

The respondents were asked if they are fascinated with beautiful sceneries to aim for a sightseeing variety in visiting certain tourist destinations and most of the respondents answered:

“Yes, mountains and beaches.”

The air at the beach is thought to be chock-full of negative ions. Not only do these boost your immune system, but they also help balance your levels of serotonin. “This improves your mood and reduces your stress levels, plus it helps you sleep better at night (Graffagna, 2018). Most of the respondents answered they want to go to the beach or mountain one of the main reason is to relax and to escape to a stressful environment.

The respondents were asked if they are encouraged to visit a tourist destination because of its authentic historical background and how do they get to know about the history, most of the respondents answered that they conducted a research. As one of the respondents a 24 year old girl said

“Yes, travel blogs online”

There are numerous travel blogs available for people to share and learn about travel experiences. (Chen 2014). Social media is one of the reasons why they got to know about the history mostly they answered through online blogs and research.

They were also asked if they are attracted to entertainment or activities done in a particular tourist destination most of the respondents answered yes. As the 28 year old girl said

“Yes, festivals.”

A big part of every province in the Philippines is the festivals they celebrate once a year. These festivals either originated from their patron saints or from the legends that came from their place. Visitors can check out popular festivals like the Sinulog Festival in Cebu City, Panagbenga Festival in Baguio City, Moriones Festival in Marinduque, and Rodeo Festival in Masbate. (Dumaraos 2017). Visiting in a destination during a festival will leave you a completely different experience. You can also mingle with the locals and know more about their culture and traditions.

The last factor is Marketing Efforts. Most of the respondents answered yes if they are encouraged to visit an emerging destination. As the 25 girl said:

“Yes, it is fresh for a lot of people.”

Nowadays, people want to visit emerging destinations because of the pureness of the place. It is less crowded compared to popular destination. Some of the emerging destinations are not that commercialized. (Bernthal, 2017) stated that emerging destination is not actually undiscovered places but they are newly discovered places which is new for many people. Most of the emerging destinations are in locations with less traffic and less expensive commodities compared to some big cities.

4. CONCLUSION

Most of the respondents certainly start with the first level of decision-making through Awareness, before their trip concludes. The second level is Consideration which is also taken into account most especially in terms of the price of their trip. The third level, Intent shows their choice of scheduling a trip which is mostly on special occasions. The respondents showed a careful assessment of the aforementioned levels of decision-making. The respondents examined the push and pull factors of social media through interrelating it to their own purpose and reason of travelling.

The findings showed that social media is indeed a great factor as an informative tool for potential travelers nowadays. Since everything can be found on the internet, people tend to also rely on what they see, read or watch online regarding emerging tourist destinations or even particularly to the places they desire to visit. Most of the respondents have common goals and purpose of travel, it could either be because of their personal desires or can be because of their capability to travel for their own good.

The proponents concluded that not all the time social media is a means of communication, but also a useful platform to be informative and a contributor in one's decision-making in planning for a trip. Social media can be an aid to guide potential travelers in what things should be done, have, remembered and to look out for whenever on a trip. All of these can be found virtually from experienced individuals or frequent travelers. Travel brands online will surely benefit through the strong impact of social media content to the levels of decision-making of the potential travelers correlating their own purpose of travelling through the push and pull factors.

The proponents recommended potential travelers to always be careful and precise regarding their information-gathering for chosen tourist attractions to be visited, refer to reliable sources only. The weakness of the study is how the respondents are only 10 in number whereas it is suggested for future studies to be a quantitative research using purposive sampling. Moreover, the proponents recommend to use the same framework and to find a better area for data gathering.

TOURIST DESTINATION GUIDE

RATIONALE

This output is made to meet the objectives of the study that will put emphasis on the careful assessment of levels of decision-making and to identify the push and pull factors as a purpose of travel. Before a trip concludes, planning is bound to set forth first ahead of anything else, this is where social media is put into consideration. This can serve as a tool for research, an aid for any booking or transactions to be done for convenience. Social media can also be a platform of electronic word of mouth to weigh and compare opinions, insights and recommendations from experienced travelers.

MISSION

The mission of this Tourist Destination Guide is to be informative and provide tips or guidelines for the potential travelers to achieve a hassle-free planning and vacation itself.

VISION

The proponents envision in producing a domestic travel guide for a convenient yet worthwhile vacation experience for all.

OBJECTIVES

The proponents' objectives for this Tourist Destination Guide is to aid potential travelers to work their way in proper and precise planning for their ideal vacation, as well as to help avoid inconveniences and bad experiences during their holiday.

AWARENESS

Always make sure of your travel time and how far is your destination. Long trips are fun because of the sights to be seen while on the road while short trips are best for the type of tourists who seizes the duration of their vacation.

CONSIDERATION

Considering the price is a must. Travelling does not have to be expensive or too cheap, as long as it would satisfy your travel needs and wants.

INTENT

When you are able to see blog posts, you can ask your friends or family to have an idea of the place so you can arrange your tour that can suit your preferences.

DECISION

Reviews from experienced tourists might reflect the quality of service and the beauty of a destination.

FULFILLING ONE'S PRESTIGE

Do you have travel goals? If you are into discovering new places, make sure to be ready for the adventure that you are up to. You will never know unless you try new things. You will be able to discover the hidden gem of a destination.

SEEKING RELAXATION

Witness the beauty of our own land and do the things you haven't tried or done in a while to help you to unwind and relax. So when you get back to your daily routine, you would feel better and positive because of the enjoyment and peace of mind that you have felt.

SIGHTSEEING VARIETY

Be mindful about the weather especially on the dates of your travel, it will give you a chance to change plans. Research about the place and take note about their safety precautions.

HISTORY AND CULTURE

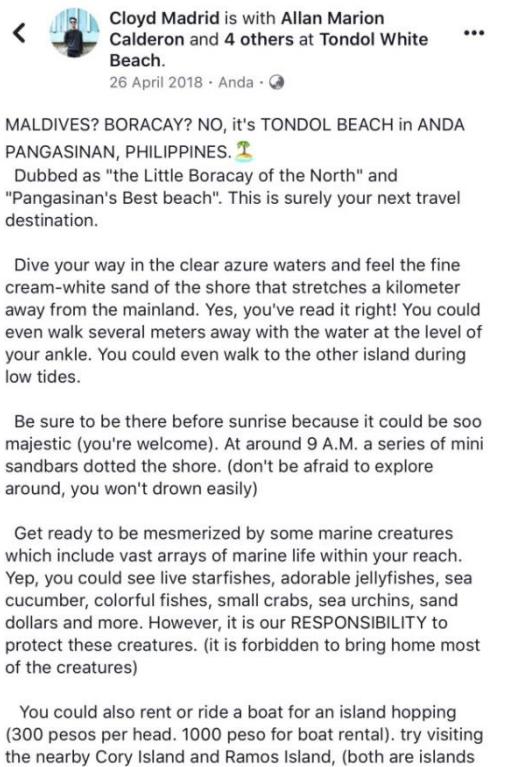
Enjoy the destination while witnessing their lifestyle, culture and rituals etc. It can help you to be more open in their culture and can add to your cultural awareness. Travel like a local!

EVENTS AND ACTIVITIES

It's better to book an earlier flight and celebrate some festivals with the local. Travelling in the Philippines would not be complete if you don't attend festivals. Visiting in a destination during a festival will leave you a completely different experience.

MARKETING EFFORTS

Why not opt for emerging tourist destinations that the Philippines can offer? Places like Siargao, Pangasinan, Batanes and more. These places are fresh just for you. Don't you want to have something new to share to your friends and family?





<https://www.facebook.com/cloyd.domagas.madrid/posts/339229959934104>

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