Impact of Social Media Benefits on Tourists' Travel Choice

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Abstract:- Travel and tourism is one of the world's most promising industries, and information is critical to its success. It's no secret that social media is a significant information source when it comes to influencing the travel plans of tourists. Since social media allows users to connect with people from all over the world, users can take advantage and numerous benefits which have diverse impacts on their travel choice. Hence, relatively few studies have addressed the relationship between social media benefits and tourists' travel choice to Sri Lanka, the purpose of this study was to identify the impact of Social media benefits on tourist' travel choice to Sri Lanka. The quantitative research approach was used to attain the suggested study objective, and data was collected in the form of primary data from 380 inbound tourists who visited Sri Lanka. Finding of this study suggested that hedonic, social, psychological, monetary, and functional benefits of social media have a significant positive impact on tourists' travel choice. The study had further recommended for tourist practitioners to maintain an active presence in social media while ensuring the social enhancement, personal identity, involvement, and trust of the travelers. Moreover, to aware about the destinations promotion through social media and strengthening the interaction via social media such as blog articles, videos, pictures, virtual product, and informative postings have been discovered as a valuable tool for attracting tourists to a destination.

Keywords:- In-Bound Tourist, Social Media Benefits, Tourists' Choice, Sri Lanka.

I. INTRODUCTION

The rise of the internet and related technologies, particularly social media platforms, has long been recognised as having an ongoing impact on tourists' decision-making in the tourism business. Tourism services and products are primarily affected by this [1]. Social media can be described as a "group of applications which operates on the internet Web 2.0 and allows for the exchange of information among the users"[2]. Social media has become a perfect platform for the tourism industry, which relies heavily on information to operate because of its capacity to spread enormous volumes of data quickly [3].

Travelers should obtain as much information as possible before making a final purchase decision on travel-related items in order to reduce the risk of purchasing tourism services due to the experimental nature of the majority of tourism product purchases [4]. Tourists today rely heavily on information from others to decrease the risk and uncertainty associated with purchasing travel-related products. It is widely believed that information posted by other travellers on online platforms is viewed as the same as the offline recommendations from friends, family and other travellers [5]–[8].

Background of the Study

One of the major issues in tourism product is the lack of direct experience with the product itself [9] . Due to this very reason, travel related purchase choices are considered very complex, being compound and experiential in nature Normally, because of the intangible, inseparable, variable and perishable nature of services, their uncertainty and perceived risk are considered very high [10]. Because of that, taking a choice in a service perspective especially in tourism and hospitality sector involves a high amount of uncertainty. This reason triggers consumers to spend a long time retrieving facts relevant to their purchase choices in a struggle to reduce their risk [11].

The use of social media has permeated every aspect of our lives. The capacity to post photos/videos, views, and happenings in real time has made social media increasingly popular in the last several years[12]. Social media sites like Facebook and Twitter give their users the chance to meet new people, join organisations that share their interests, and develop professional networks. The usage of social media as a source of information is growing at a rapid rate. People use social media to find and analyse options before making a decision. Because of social media, everyone can be a messenger. When people post about their travel experiences, photographs, videos, and other content on social media, it may act as a catalyst for others in their network to do the same. Furthermore, the whole tourist sector (such as tour operators, hotels, resorts, restaurants, parks, and so on) may use social media to market their services. Different tourism destination authorities can prove their worldwide exposure even at the international level. The study's findings will help tour operators better evaluate their prospects in terms of social media influence [13].

Statement of the Problem

Travellers are becoming more and more dependent on social media in making choices regarding their travel arrangements. They are relying more on e – word of mouth than travel agents [14]. It is very obvious that travellers are

using different kinds of social media to collect information before making a purchase decision regarding a tourism product. Many studies have been conducted to understand the impact of social media on various aspects of traveller behaviour to evaluate social media use during the Holiday Travel Planning Process [15]. Social media change the travel industry [9]. and the role of social media in online travel information search. [16]. But in Sri Lankan context hardly any study that had focused on the impact of social media and their role in travel choice.

With the increasing number of international tourist arrivals and the increasing involvement of social media in travel and tourism industry, it is important to study the impact of social media in tourism industry from the perspective of tourist and what impact social media exerts when tourist select destination as their travel choice. As a country with booming tourist arrivals, it is important to identify how social media could be used strategically by understanding its impact on tourist choices, especially on travel choice as it is a key building block in any tourist destination.

Research Questions
How social media benefits impact on tourists' travel choice.

Objective of the Study
The objective of this research is to identify the impact of social media benefits on tourist travel choice.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Social Media
Over the recent years the use of social media platforms has increased significantly. Different individuals use social media for different reasons [17]. While social media has become an integral part social life for young generation, for others, social media is a good source of information [18]. Social media use mobile and web-based technologies to generate highly interactive platforms through which individuals and communities share, create, discuss, and alter user-generated content [19].

Social media can be defined in different ways. One of the most accepted definition of social media is by Kaplan and Heinlein [20]. According to Kaplan and Heinlein "Social media is a group of internet based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0 and that allow the creation and exchange of user generated content"(as cited in [15].

Social media exist in a variety of form which vary in terms of their scope and functionality. Some sites are for the general masses, (ex-Facebook) and sites like LinkedIn, are for professional networks; and serve numerous purposes [16], [19]. Kaplan and Heinlein classified social media according to their level of social presence, media richness, level of self-presentation and self-disclosure identifying 6 social media types. They are social media can be defined in different ways. One of the most accepted definition of social media is by Kaplan and Heinlein (2010). According to Kaplan and

Heinlein "Social media is a group of internet based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0 and that allow the creation and exchange of user generated content"(as cited in [3].

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- Social Networking Sites – Facebook, LinkedIn
- Blogs - Blogger
- Content Communities – YouTube, Flickr, Scrib, Slideshare, Delicious
- Collaborative Projects – Wikipedia, Wikitravel
- Virtual Social Worlds – Second Life
- Virtual Game Worlds – World of Warcraft

But in modern context, further to this classification, there are some other types of social media as well [3]. They are
- Micro – Blogs – Twitter
- Consumer review and rating websites – TripAdvisor. Epinions
- Internet Fora – Fodor's Travel Talk

With the rise of social media, the power of sharing information is shifted from those in marketing and public relations to the individuals and communities that are now able create, share, information using blogs, tweets, Facebook entries, videos and photos [19].

Decision making process
Any final purchase decision will not be made at once [21]. A purchase decision is the outcome of an extensive, detailed process that may include a broad information search, brand comparison, and evaluation [22]. According to the Business Dictionary consumer decision making process or in other words consumer buying behaviour is the process by which individuals search for, select, purchase, use, and dispose of goods and services, in satisfying their needs and wants. Simply, consumer behaviour is the process customers experience when they make purchases, and it encompasses factors that impact their decision. As this process is very complex in nature there are many models presented by different authors.

According to the model presented by Silverman [23] consumer decision making process takes place is 5 stages as problem/need recognition, information search, evaluating alternatives, purchase decision and post purchase behaviour. Kotler further developed and explained this model [22].

Problem recognition refers to the stage when consumers realize that they want something. This occurs as a result of searching for changes on current situation due to dissatisfaction [24]. A consumer may recognize the need through internal stimuli (based on normal needs like hunger)

or through external stimuli such as advertising. [24]. After realizing a need, consumer starts to search for information internally (past experiences) and externally (asking from friends) about the diverse options that he or she have to satisfy the need [22]. After evaluating the alternatives, a consumer decides on what to purchase. This stage is the stage where the consumer makes the actual purchase and in the last stage the consumer evaluates his choice of the purchase and decides whether to buy it again or try a different product next time [22].

Social media and tourist choice

Because of the intangible, inseparable, variable and perishable nature of services, their uncertainty and perceived risk are considered very high [10]. Because of this reason, service consumers do not rely on a single source of information. Instead they seek for multiple and different types of information sources. Internet and web 2.0 has reshaped the way people search for information. According to Wikipedia, 'Web 2.0' refers to the second generation of web-based services, which are more interactive, context rich, and user friendly, allowing users to engage in a social media discussion and collaborate on user-generated content in a virtual community. Unlike web 1.0 which was a read only and an unidirectional source of information, web 2.0 allows each and every person to share knowledge and experiences [25]. Tourism and hospitality industry is one of a major field that is affected by this occurrence [26]. Now instead of relying solely on travel agents to book and arrange everything, consumers themselves search for travel related information. Social media which made its debut under the web 2.0 concept allows its users to create and exchange different user created content. The two-way communication prevailing in social media, offers freedom for people to engage, exchange messages, share and connect while enabling consumers to contribute their thoughts, opinions, creations and feelings to the internet, changing the way information is created and diffused. It is because of this very reason that hoteliers are focusing on social media as well while maintaining the hotel website as the core digital strategy [27]. Wasko and Faraj [28] found that people join online communities due to tangible returns (i.e. promotions, raises, discounts) or intangible returns (i.e. reputation, moral obligations, relationships)

Hu and Kettinger [29] identified that people join and use social media because the perceived benefits of social media are higher than the perceived costs of using social media. These benefits are perceived enjoyment, informational value, social influence and social experience.

Functional benefits

Functional benefits is the sharing and exchanging of information through social media platforms [30]. Travel related purchases are viewed as very complex due to the lack of direct exposure to the product itself and needs extensive information search before making a final decision [15]. Because of functional benefits consumers can interact with other individuals and gather and compare information before taking a decision and further while searching for information,

community members can obtain answers to their questions or spread useful information to others as well.

Social benefits

Social benefits states the various types of help and support that members can obtain and provide for through social media [30] Individuals can help each other by exchanging opinions and answering questions. As an example a person who have previously stayed in a hotel can help another person who is considering to stay at the same hotel by giving him information about room types and conditions, available menus and the quality of food answering his concerns.

Psychological benefits

Psychological benefits refers to the sense of belonging and association with others in the community [30]. People join social media sites for psychological needs. These needs include a sense of belonging to the community, identity expression through the community, and a sense of attachment with other members in the community. Simply, people make social media a very important part of their life [31]. Social media communities have their own norms, unique language and member identities.

Monetary benefits

Monetary benefits are the economic advantages received by consumers such as free coupons, price discounts and special deals when using social media. Individuals build relationship with service providers (ex- hotels) through social media with the expectation of receiving economic benefits. As an example, when a hotel arrange for a community event in social media that create winners who are awarded with monetary benefits like coupons or all-expense paid stay, it will attract more potential customers for the hotel. Further it was revealed that monetary benefits attract traveller interest and encourage them to purchase affecting their purchase decision [32].

Hedonic benefits

Individuals join social media for their own enjoyment. They have the need to be entertained and amused. For this purpose they seek hedonic benefits from social media [31]. Hedonic benefits means the positive emotional conditions, such as feeling entertained and amused while using social media Interacting in a social media platform is a procedure through which individuals gather not only valuable information but also enjoyment, pleasure, and new experiences [33]

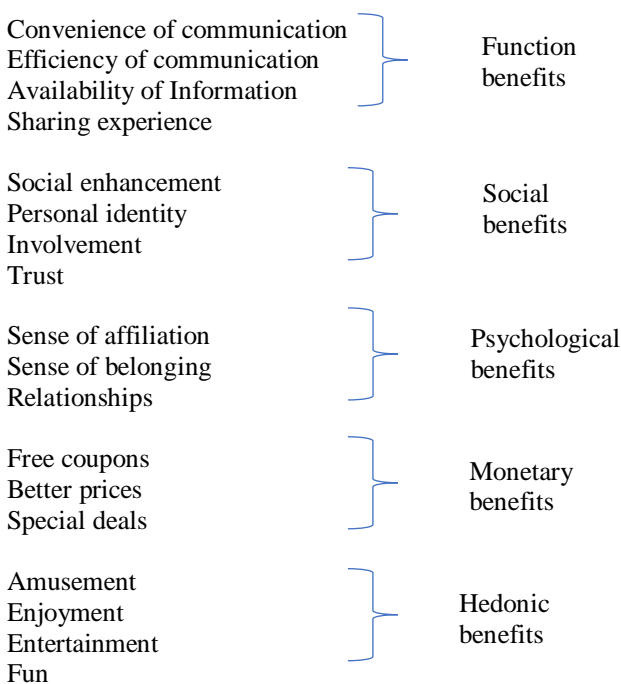## III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Figure 1: Conceptual model of the study
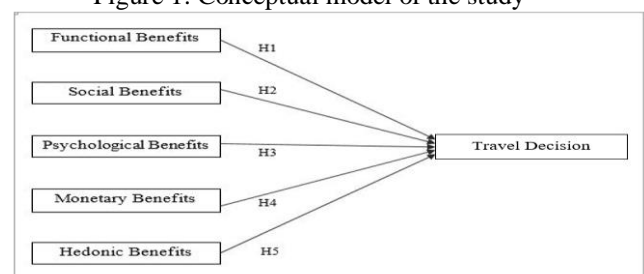
According to the literature rivew, the researcher identified the types of social media impacts on travel decision making & it's impact to the domastic tourist when they choole to travel. Therefore, based on the past leterature review, the researcher developed the conceptual framework. Based on the past research findings the researcher identified five benefits received by social media user. All those benifits divided as Functional benefits, social benefits, psychological benefits, monetary benefits and hedonic benefits. Those factors directly affect to the to choose travel decision.

Hypothesis

H1: Functional benefits of social media positively affect on inbound tourists' travel choice

H2: Social benefits of social media positively affect on inbound tourists' travel choice

H3: Psychological benefits of social media positively affect on inbound tourists' travel choice.

H4: Monetary benefits of social media positively affect on on inbound tourists' travel choice

H5: Hedonic benefits of social media positively affect on travel on inbound tourists' travel choice

Based on the literature review the researcher identified there are twelve types of dimensions for these benefits. They are,

Convenience of communication
Efficiency of communication
Availability of Information
Sharing experience
— Function benefits

Social enhancement
Personal identity
Involvement
Trust
— Social benefits

Sense of affiliation
Sense of belonging
Relationships
— Psychological benefits

Free coupons
Better prices
Special deals
— Monetary benefits

Amusement
Enjoyment
Entertainment
Fun
— Hedonic benefits

Research Design

This research was carried out to identify the impact of social media on travel decision making reference to In-bound tourists in Sri Lanka. Data was collected using a self-administered questionnaire given to in-bound tourists visiting Kandy City area and Knuckles Region. Population was the all the tourist visited the Kandy City and Knuckles.

The Researcher used convenience sampling method to select the respondents for the Questionnaire Survey of the study. Sample size consists with in-bound tourist in Sri Lanka. The researcher selected 380 respondents as sample. A total of 380 tourists were selected under non probability, convenience sampling technique as the sample for the study. when the population is more than 1 million, the sample should be 380 at 95% confidence level.

Reliability

Cronbach's alpha is the standard method for measuring reliability. The Cronbach's alpha should be at least reach 0.7 that means good reliable. It depicts the internal consistency if the questionnaire used for the survey. According to the [34] identified six category to estimate reliability which are (>0.9-Excellent), (>0.8-good), (>0.7-Acceptable), (>0.6-AQuetionable), (>0.5-poor) and (<5-unacceptable).

Validity

The construct validity of the questionnaire can be assessed using factor analysis. It is decided whether the sample size is large enough to carry out the factor analysis using the KMO of sampling adequacy, and the value should be more than 0.5. Factor analysis results can be accepted if the test's significance level is less than 0.05.

Data Analysis Method

The data collected from the designed questionnaires were processed and analyzed by using very formal research analyzing and presentation methods. The analysis was supported by using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) 21.0

For the demographic characteristic; gender, age, region and occupation will not all be deeply analyzed because researcher tend to study the factors affecting on community participation in tourism related business.

Correlation Coefficient Analysis

A statistical analysis known as a correlation coefficient analysis can be used to determine the strength between two variables. Correlation coefficient analysis can reveal whether or not two intervals or variables are positively or negatively related. The correlation coefficient ranges from -1 to +1. As a result, relationships can be assessed using decision-making rules.

If value is:

$r = +1$ (strong positive correlation)

$0.5 < r < +1$ (high positive correlation)

$0 < r < 0.5$ (weak positive correlation)

$r = 0$ (no correlation)

$-0.5 < r < 0$ (weak negative correlation)

$-1 < r < -0.5$ (high negative correlation)

$r = -1$ (strong negative correlation)

Hypotheses Testing

Hypothesis is a testable assertion based on the rationally conjectured relationship between two or more variables and testing hypothesis confirms the conjectured relationship and there are two sorts of hypothesis as Null hypothesis (H0) and Alternative hypothesis (H1) As a result, the null hypothesis says there is no relationship between two variables that is significant, while the alternative hypothesis says there is a relationship between the variables.

The researcher have 95% Confidence level and used α = 0.05 as significance level. If P < 0.05 reject the Null Hypothesis and if P > 0.05 accept the null hypothesis. The researcher find the correlation and check whether a P – value for test the proposed hypotheses and standardized Coefficient Beta indicates which independent variable more influence on the dependent variable Adjusted R- Squired value consider for evaluate goodness of the selected model.

IV. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1: Sample Profile

Demographic factor	Item	Frequency	Percent
Gender of the respondent	Male	195	50.8
	Female	185	49.2
	Total	380	100.0
Age of the respondent	Below 18	11	2.9
	18 - 20	54	15.1
	21 - 30	160	41.7
	31 - 40	78	20.3
	41 - 55	64	16.7
	Over 55	13	3.4
	Total	380	100.0
Nationality of the respondent	Asian	40	11.5
	African	2	.5
	American	6	1.6
	European	330	85.9
	Middle Eastern	2	.5
	Total	380	100.0
Duration of stay	Less than 4 days	25	6.5
	4 - 7 days	34	9.9
	8 -14 days	182	47.4
	15 - 21 days	115	29.9
	More than 21 days	24	6.3
	Total	380	100.0
Purpose of visit	Vacation	353	91.7
	Business	13	4.4
	Sports	2	.5
	Religious/Cultural	10	2.6
	VFR	2	.5
	Total	380	100.0

Source: Survey data (2020)

Table 2: Most used social media sites

Social Media site	Frequency	Percentage
Facebook	215	56.0
Youtube	70	19.3
Twitter	67	17.4
Tripadvisor	52	14.6
Instagram	51	13.5
Wikipedia	42	10.9
Pinterest	41	10.7
Whatsapp	13	3.4
Hotel.com	2	0.5
OTA Reviews	1	0.3

Source: Survey data (2020)

Facebook was the most used social media among the respondents. Out of 380 respondents 215 travellers use Facebook social media site.

Youtube is the next mostly used social media site. It is used by 74 respondents. Twitter is the 3rd most used social media platform among the tourists. Instagram is used by 52 respondents and Wikipedia and Pinterest are used by 42 and 41 respondents respectively.

Table 3: Frequency of social media use

		Frequency	Percent
Social Media use	Less than one day	2	.5
	Once in a day	171	45
	Many times a day	193	50.8
	Once in a week	3	.8
	3 -4 times a week	11	2.9
	Total	380	100.0

Source: Survey data (2020)

For the question "How often do you use SM?" Majority of the respondents, that is 50.8% respondents, answered that they use social media many times a day. 45% of the respondents use social media once a day. Only 3.7% of the respondents do not use social media on a daily basis.

Table 4: Reliability analysis

Variable	No. of Items	Cronbach's Alpha
Functional Benefits	08	.792 -0.697
Social Benefits	07	.871
Psychological Benefits	07	.875
Monetary Benefits	03	.958 – 0.762
Hedonic Benefits	06	.813
Travel Choice	04	.946 – 0.801

Source: Survey data (2020)

All the alpha values lies between 0.69-0.81. It reach the acceptable level of the test and, it implies the match of the develop model and the relationship between the independent variables and dependent variable was variables were accurate and consistent.

Table 5: Descriptive statistics

Descriptive Statistics	Mean	Std. Deviation
	Statistic	Statistic
Functional Benefits	4.1517	.38718
Social Benefits	3.8945	.62667
Psychological Benefits	3.6968	.64331
Monetary Benefits	3.3698	.89504
Hedonic Benefits	4.0217	.48859
Travel Choice	3.9336	.76443

Source: Survey data (2020)

Descriptive statistics were used to determine the basic nature of the research variables. The mean values of the independent variables' selected dimensions were moderately high, with mean values ranging from 3.36 to 4.15.

Correlation analysis

Correlation analysis was carried out to test whether there is a relationship between the independent variables and the dependent variable.

Table 6: Correlation table

		Travel Choice
Functional Benefits	Pearson Correlation	.531**
	Sig. (1-tailed)	.000
	N	380
Social Benefits	Pearson Correlation	.449**
	Sig. (1-tailed)	.000
	N	380
Psychological Benefits	Pearson Correlation	.442**
	Sig. (1-tailed)	.000
	N	380
Monetary Benefits	Pearson Correlation	.494**
	Sig. (1-tailed)	.000
	N	380
Hedonic Benefits	Pearson Correlation	.632**
	Sig. (1-tailed)	.000
	N	380
Travel Choice	Pearson Correlation	1
	Sig. (1-tailed)	.000
	N	380

Source: Survey Data (2020)

All the variables were significant because the p values were less than 0.01. Since the correlation would be significant at the 0.01 level (1-tailed).

Regression analysis

After identifying the existing relationships between the independent variables and the travel choice, Regression analysis was used to test the impact of independent variables on the dependent variable.

Table 7: Model summery

R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the estimate
.873	.763	.759	.3749

Source: Survey data (2020)

According to the table 7, Adjusted R square is 0.759. It means that there is 75.9% of the independent variables affect to the dependent variable.

The R value is used for as a measure of quality of prediction of Dependent Variable. The R and Adjusted R value indicate the proportion of variance in dependent variable that can be explained by the independent variables.

According to Table 7, The R value is 0.873 (87%) and it indicated strong relationship between independent variables and dependent variable and good quality of prediction of Dependent Variable. The R Square value is 0.763 (76%) and concluded that the model has good fit to the regression line. Since, the researcher run a multiple regression and required to consider Adjusted R Squared value. The Adjusted R Squared value is 0.7591 (76%). The researcher can conclude that 76% variance of travel choice can be able to explain by independent variables: functional benefits, social benefits, psychological benefits, monetary benefits and hedonic benefits. As well as the model is good model for the study and among the many factors, which can make impact on social media sage, functional benefits, social benefits, psychological benefits, monetary benefits and hedonic benefits are impact 76% on travel decision.

Multiple Regression Analysis

Multiple regression analysis used as the main analysis tool for test the proposed hypotheses. The researcher used backward method for the analysis and got one model as a result.

Table 8: Coefficient of Multiple Regression Analysis

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	-1.432	.226		-6.346	.000
Functional Benefits	.161	.078	.082	2.066	.039
Social Benefits	.389	.053	.318	7.286	.000
Psychological Benefits	.185	.050	.155	3.701	.000
Monetary Benefits	.168	.025	.196	6.762	.000
Hedonic Benefits	.481	.055	.308	8.724	.000

Source: Survey data (2020)

According to Table 8, The Independent Variables which are functional benefits, social benefits, psychological benefits, monetary benefits and hedonic benefits. structural barriers and cultural barriers shows the significant P-value as 0.039 and 0.000 (P <0.05).

Summary of Hypothesis testing

Table 9: Hypotheses testing summery

Mark	Hypothesis	Significance	Impact	Result
H1	Functional benefits of social media positively affect on travel choice of in-bound tourists in Sri Lanka.	0.039	Positive	Accept
H2	Social benefits of social media positively affect on travel choice of in-bound tourists in Sri Lanka.	0.000	Positive	Accept
H3	Psychological benefits of social media positively affect on travel choice of in-bound tourists in Sri Lanka.	0.000	Positive	Accept
H4	Hedonic benefits of social media positively affect on travel choice of in-bound tourists in Sri Lanka.	0.000	Positive	Accept
H5	Monetary benefits of social media positively affect on travel choice of in-bound tourists in Sri Lanka.	0.000	Positive	Accept

Source: Survey data (2020)

V. CONCLUSION

The study addresses the social media impact on travel decision making. The statistical results support to some proposed research hypotheses. The impact of functional benefits, social benefits, psychological benefits, monetary benefits and hedonic benefits of social media Operational barriers, Structural Barriers and Cultural Barriers were statistically measured with travel choice of inbound tourists in Sri Lanka.

Reliability was tested and regression analysis was used to test the hypothesis. All the hypothesis were accepted with significant positive impacts. Therefor it can be concluded that there is a significant positive impact of benefits of social media on travel choice of in-bound tourist in Sri Lanka. Tourism service providers should focus on utilizing social media effectively as social media has a significant impact on travel choice among travellers.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings of this study suggests that tourism service providers and tourism marketers to give more attention to social media. As the social media utilization increase among tourists, the impact caused by social media on travel choices and tourism products demand also increase because of the existing positive impact.

Gathering information is the first real behaviour in consumer decision making process. In this stage travellers start gathering information and compare alternatives. Social media helps travellers to gather real information through its functional benefits. Tourism marketers and managers should communicate the real facts and details in social media. Because through social media now travellers have various means of obtaining true and real facts such as referring others comments and posts.

Further it is important for hotel marketers and mangers to maintain active presence in social media. According to the findings of the study, most travellers expect to maintain relationships with hotel brands. By maintaining active presence in social media, providing prompt responses to traveller inquiries will affect to increase the tourist arrivals to a destination. Hotel managers and marketers also should focus on providing monetary benefits for customers through social media. The main reason travellers search for means of establishing relationship with hotel brands is to receive monetary benefits.

The study revealed that travellers consider enjoyment and the interesting nature of the information presented. Also, Tourism and hospitality marketers, destination management companies should take advantages of social media to triggers needs among social media users by sharing offers, special deals and pictures and brochures related to tourism products. Different methods of interaction via social media such as chat rooms, videos, pictures, virtual product presentations and informative postings, for example, virtual presentations via NFC technology (Near Field Communication) can be used let travellers experience the product online before the actual purchase.

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