



Effect of Customer Characteristics, Content Characteristics and Source Credibility on Customer Response: Developing A Conceptual Model for The Tourism Industry

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Abstract

Social media has brought about a huge transformation in the way people interact, share information and socialize. This changing trend has created opportunities for organisations to divert their marketing spending on social media platforms, as this enables a more direct interaction and engaging relationship with customers. This paper presents a review of literature pertaining to the factors that impact the creation and usage of user generated content (UGC) on a social media-based travel community. The study proposes a conceptual model that will help researchers in exploring a traveller's perspective about UGC, in making well informed choices pertaining to destinations, hotels, etc. The study further focuses on *customer characteristics, source credibility and content credibility* as antecedents of customers' response (information usage and information sharing) while considering the user generated content on a travel community on social media, treating customer engagement as a mediating variable.

The paper suggests how the travel and tourism industry can use social media-based communities as a medium of information sharing and getting feedback to strategically position their service offerings in a competitive industry. This research will

further help both academicians and marketers to better understand, analyse and explain customers’ responses on a social media-based travel community and will suggest avenues for future research.

Keywords: Tourism, Content Credibility, Source Credibility, User Characteristics, and User Generated Content.

INTRODUCTION

The rising popularity of social media as a channel have forced various brands and companies to look for innovative ways of reaching, connecting, and engaging customers, as it provides unmatched opportunities for brand building (Spillecke & Perrey, 2012).

As per the recent statistics, total number of people accessing the internet around the world are around 3.8 billion; which accounts for around 50% of the world’s population (Table 1). With this increasing number of people using the internet and social media; there is an emerging need for organizations to understand online consumer behaviour.

Table 1: Key Statistical Indicators for the World’s Internet & Social Media Users, Jan 2019

Total Population	Internet Users	Active Social Media Users	Unique Mobile Users	Mobile Social Media Users
7.676 Billion	4.388 Billion	3.484 Billion	5.112 Billion	3.256 Billion
Urbanisation-56%	Penetration-57%	Penetration-45%	Penetration-67%	Penetration-42%

Source: Population: United Nations; U.S. Census Bureau; **Internet:** InternetWorldStats; ITU; World Bank; CIA World Factbook; Eurostat; Local Government Bodies and Regulatory Authorities; MidEastMedia.Org; Reports in Reputable Media; **Social Media:** Platforms’ Self-Serve Advertising Tools; Press Releases, and Investor Earnings Announcements, Arab Social Media Report, Techrasa; Niki Aghaei; Rose.RU (All Latest Available Data in January 2019).

Table 2: Annual Growth in Key Statistical Indicators, Jan 2019

Internet Users	Active Social Media Users	Unique Mobile Users	Active Mobile Social Media Users
+9.1% (Since Jan 2018)	+9% (Since Jan 2018)	+2% (Since Feb 2018)	+10% (Since Jan 2018)
+ 367 Million	+ 288 Million	+100 Million	+ 297 Million

Source: Population: United Nations; U.S. Census Bureau; **Internet:** InternetWorldStats; ITU; World Bank; CIA World Factbook; Eurostat; Local Government Bodies and Regulatory Authorities; MidEastMedia.Org; Reports in Reputable Media; **Social Media:** Platforms' Self-Serve Advertising Tools; Press Releases, and Investor Earnings Announcements, Arab Social Media Report, Techrasa; Niki Aghaei; Rose.RU (All Latest Available Data in January 2019).

These effects are also marking a great impression on the travel & tourism industry. Social media is transforming the way travellers search for, and share information, about travel destinations on Facebook, you tube and other SNSs (Xiang et. al., 2015; Sigala et. al., 2012).

The internet has grown as a preferred way for travellers, not only to look for information and visualise the destination, but also as a medium of online communication. In travel planning, travellers widely rely on the information available on the internet and share content about their experiences (Gretzel & Hyan Yoo, 2008). These are some strong reasons for destination marketers to be vigilant towards online communication on social media (Martin & Woodside, 2011). Studies on the effect of group influence on purchase decisions related to products are available, lesser research is available focussing on services, and even lesser on tourism, even though the importance of informal communication channels is known as a strong driving factor especially in service purchase decisions (Currie et. al., 2008).

Social media may greatly help in effectively communicating messages across target markets. However, the capabilities of this medium have not been realized to the optimum levels. There is a great need for organisations to take note of, and analyse the information being shared on social media based travel communities. Studies clearly show that the research on social media based virtual communities is still in the nascent stage and even the terminology has not yet been standardized (Lange-Faria & Elliot, 2012; Young Cung & Buhalis, 2008). Literature suggests that this creation of online communities and the sense of belongingness should be explored in detail and analysed further (Stavrianea & Kavoura, 2014). There is a great need to examine and analyse the perceptions of social media users about the medium (Chan-Olmsted & Cho, 2013; Ferguson & Greer, 2011).

The primary motive of this study is to address gaps in previous studies, pertaining to the antecedents of customer response, to the UGC shared online, in the tourism industry. This paper further attempts to examine the role of user engagement as a mediating variable. *This paper proposes a model that contributes to the development of*

a multilevel conceptualization of customer response, to the user generated content, shared on social media-based travel communities.

A REVIEW OF LITERATURE ON ENGAGEMENT AND CUSTOMER RESPONSE

The concept of engagement has fascinated a lot of researchers and marketers. Many concepts based on engagement have been discussed in literature. Table 3 tabulates concepts on engagement, as published in previous research studies.

Table 3: Studies on Concepts based on Engagement

Concepts based on Engagement	Author
Customer Brand Engagement	Hollebeek, 2011
Customer Engagement Behaviour	Van Doorn et al., 2010
Online Consumer Engagement	Mollen & Wilson, 2010
User-Generated Hotel Reviews	Wei et al., 2013
Customer Engagement Cycle	Sashi, 2012
Community Engagement	Hamilton & Alexander, 2013
Co-Creation	Grissemann & Stokburger-Sauer, 2012, Cabiddu, et. al., 2013

Engagement in the virtual world can include active participation of individuals, online browsing, creation of online content or contribution (Yoo & Gretzel, 2011) in other ways like sharing content or commenting. It is important for organisations to recognise the significance of the levels of customer participation in travel based online communities (Hamilton & Alexander, 2013), and the generation of user-generated reviews as a kind of customer engagement behaviour (Park & Allen, 2013; Wei et al., 2013).

Some studies describe engagement as a psychological state (Mollen & Wilson, 2010; Vivek, Beatty, & Morgan, 2012), and others emphasise on its behavioural aspect (Hollebeek, 2011; Van Doorn et al., 2010; Kumar et al., 2010). Customer engagement is a unidimensional variable and embraces only the emotional response of a customer when interacting with a brand (Spratt et al., 2009). On the other hand, as per some researchers, customer engagement is a behavioural response of the customers driven by motivational

factors (Verhoef et al., 2010; Bijmolt et al., 2010). Additionally, some other researchers consider engagement as a multi-dimensional construct having both behavioural and psychological dimensions (Hollebeek, et al., 2011; Patterson et al., 2006). In agreement of the multi-dimensional approach, Jacoby & Chestnut (1976) suggested that the behavioural dimension cannot provide enough understanding of the aspects underlying repeat purchase. This holds true for customer engagement as well, where just a customers' behavioural participation may not necessarily mean an engaged customer. The participation in brand communities, may be for gathering more information about the product or to reduce perceived risk, rather than from being engaged with the brand (Brodie et. al., 2011). Thus, it may be said that although the behavioural dimension provides an indication to customer engagement, yet a multidimensional view is required to fully understand the complexities of the same.

Social media is providing a significant relationship marketing opportunity for marketers and this has therefore increased researchers' interest in customer engagement (Gorry & Westbrook, 2011; Hudson & Thal, 2013). Regardless of the growing research pertaining to the use of social media by the tourism industry and evidence that proves a positive ROI for businesses using this channel of communication (Dholakia & Durham, 2010), tourism researchers claim that future researches must make use of new methodologies and theories to better understand the unique features of social media (Chan & Guillet, 2011; Hudson & Thal, 2013). Development of customer engagement strategies requires better understanding of the theoretical foundations (Sashi, 2012) and this has been explored by the authors in the following section.

Information Sharing and Information Usage

Past researches on social media highlight that customer activities on social media can be classified into sharing of content (posting) and usage of content (consumption) (Schlosser, 2005; Shao, 2009). Jones et al., 2004 in their study highlighted that most users of social media consume the available information rather than posting on social media). As per Nielson (2009), more than 50% of social media users follow a brand, and a lesser percent of users actively contribute content about the brand on social media. It has also been seen that a small percent of social media users, post a larger share of the content (Bughin, 2007). Research has also shown that over time, less active users also

become significantly active on social media (Hanna et al., 2011). Table 4 summarises research already conducted in this field, the associated findings and the future research avenues delineated by these researchers.

Table 4: Future Research Avenues

S. No	Research Paper	Publication year	Authors	Findings	Methodology Used	Future Avenues
1.	“Do We Believe in TripAdvisor?” Examining Credibility Perceptions and Online Travellers’ Attitude toward Using User-Generated Content	2013	Julian K. Ayeh, Norman Au, and Rob Law1	The paper conceptualizes credibility of the source as a variable, with trustworthiness and expertise as dimensions. It points towards the strong influence of source credibility on attitude and direct but weak impact on behavioural intention. The study also explains most of the variance in intention to refer to UGC in travel planning. Lastly, the paper infers that perceptual homophily affects credibility perceptions and attitudes.	SEM	The research provides direction for future research and suggests the exploration of additional factors to better explain online credibility and the adoption of UGC in the context of travel planning. Researchers should also explore various types of credibility and their potential interactions.
2	Popularity of Brand Posts on Brand Fan Pages: An Investigation of the Effects of Social Media Marketing	2012	Lisette de Vries & Sonja Gensler & Peter S.H. LeeFlang	The paper indicates that various drivers effect the number of likes and comments on a social media brand page. For instance, rich and interactive posts on a brand page boost the number of likes. On a brand post, the number of shares of a comment is positively correlated to the number of comments. Interactive posts on brands can encourage comments.	OLS Regression	Future research may improve the understanding about the aspects that judges the popularity of online posts. It may also be interesting to explore diverse content typologies.
3.	Spreading the word through likes on Facebook	2013	Kunal Swani and George Milne, Brian P. Brown	The study suggest that B2B Facebook posts are more effective when they have the company’s brand names. And the businesses should avoid hard selling. Using emotional sentiments in Facebook posts is an effective social media marketing strategy used by marketers.	Content Analysis	Future researches should examine the use of brand names, images, videos and functional content in designing the message strategies. Further researches should study the level of user involvement when processing messages/ posts on social media.

4.	Benefitting from virtual customer environments: An empirical study of customer engagement	2015	Tibert Verhagen , Erik Swen, Frans Feldber, Jani Merikivi	The study suggests that social, hedonic and cognitive benefits seem to significantly affect customer's engagement intentions.	SEM	More variables may be examined to improve the understanding of customer engagement in virtual customer environments like customer characteristics (e.g., Chen & Guo, 2015) suggests that customer characteristics may affect the customer engagement in a virtual space.
5.	A multilevel analysis of customer engagement, its antecedents, and the effects on service innovation	2016	Ja-Shen Chen, Hua-Hung (Robin) Weng & Chio-Lun Huang	The CE model points that organisational support, sales person's characteristics and customer's rapport plays an important role in customer engagement.	SEM	Future researches may explore more potential antecedents to customer engagement. Theoretical and empirical researches should be undertaken to uncover the factors affecting customer engagement.
6.	What We Know and Don't Know About Online Word-of-Mouth: A Review and Synthesis of literature	2014	Robert Allen King & Pradeep Racherla & Victoria D. Bush		Multi-Dimensional analysis	Source (reputation etc.) and customer characteristics (consumer demographics, similarity etc.) must be examined for evaluating the credibility of the posts.
7.	Customer engagement behaviour in online social networks – the Facebook perspective	2014	Sofie Bitter and Sonja Grabner-Kräuter	Customer's relationship with the brand and communication with their pals affect customer engagement behaviour. And the study points towards the effect of trust, concerns for privacy, age and gender as moderating variables.	SEM	Future researches should identify and investigate other possible antecedents of CE like knowledge sharing intentions etc.
8.	What messages to post? Evaluating the popularity of social media communication in business versus consumer markets	2016	Kunal Swani, George R. Milne, Brian P. Brown, A. George Assaf, Naveen Donthu	The study shows that to increase the popularity of B2B messages, the companies should use brand names, emotional & functional appeals, and information search cues. Liking rate in B2B content viewers is more than the viewers of B2C content, while the commenting rate is more in B2C content viewers.	Content Analysis	Identify and explore the psychological motivations among the social media content viewers that elicits their WOM
9.	Credibility Assessment of Online	2014	Soo Young Rieh	As per the study, the relevance of information was more important when the respondents were assessing		Future research should be undertaken to study how users judge credibility of the

	Information in Context			the credibility of UGC & media content. People make more effort to assess the credibility of a post when they are themselves involved in information search as compared to when creating content.		information posted online when they ask questions on social media-based communities.
10.	Product Review Users' Perceptions of Review Quality: The Role of Credibility, Informativeness, and Readability	2014	Jo Mackie Wicz & Dave Yeats	The most informative content is perceived as the most credible information.		Future studies should explore how users judge the quality of the content posted online.
11.	Credibility in social media: opinions, news, and health information —a survey	2017	Marco Viviani and Gabriella Pasi	Assessing the credibility of online information/ content is a challenging issue because of the absence of set standards to detect fake posts and reviews.	Review Paper	In the coming years research should be undertaken to assess the credibility of content posted online.
12.	Which UGC features drive web purchase intent? A spike-and-slab Bayesian Variable Selection Approach	2016	Richard A. Owusu, Crispin M. Mutshinda, Imoh Antai, Kofi Q. Dadzie, Evelyn M. Winston	Users end up making a purchase decision when the user generated posts they refer to is relevant to them, is current, updated and credible.	spike-and-slab Bayesian variable selection mechanism into a logistic regression model	Future studies should focus on identifying the characteristics of UGC that are most relevant for SNS's.
13.	Which User-Generated content should be appreciated more? - A Study on UGC features, consumers' behavioural intentions and Social Media Engagement.	2015	Yu, Guopeng and Zou, Deqiang	Travellers' intentions to go on a trip & spread WOM, and attitudes are positively affected by the UGC characteristics such as trustworthiness and interestingness, Social media engagement.	Linear Regression Model	The researches should examine more characteristics of UGC affecting behavioural intentions
14.	Personal profile information as cues of credibility in online travel reviews	2014	Heelye Park, Zheng Xiangb*, Bharath Josiama and	The user assessment of the reviews posted online depends upon the location of the user, his/her travel interest and the quality of content of the post.	ANOVA & t-Test	Future research should validate the by examining the place and online behaviour of the traveller in a better way.

			Haejung Kima			
15.	The Value of Marketer-Generated Content on Social Network Sites: Media Antecedents and Behavioural Responses	2017	Jesús Martínez-Navarro, and Enrique Bigné	Behavioural responses are an outcome of the interestingness and trustworthiness of MGC.	Partial Least Square Regression	Future researches should create more insights into the impact of eWOM on purchase intentions of the readers.
16.	Information Seeking through Social Media: Impact of User Characteristics on Social Media Use	2013	Kyung-Sun Kim, Sei-Ching Joanna Sin, Yuqi He	Significant differences were found based on user characteristics in their usage of information posted on social networking sites.	t-Test	Research should explore the relationship between users' characteristics, social media use & evaluation & the context.
17.	What do we know about social media in tourism? A review	2014	Benxiang Zeng, Rolf Gerritsen	The study explores various dimensions of social media usage in tourism.	Review paper	Quantitative methodology should be undertaken to analyse the impact of SNS on tourism.
18.	Social media engagement behaviour: a uses and gratifications perspective	2015	Rebecca Dolan, Jodie Conduit, John Fahy & Steve Goodman	Through a theoretical model the paper examines the role of content posted on SNS in facilitating reader/user engagement in a social media context.	Review	A study of user characteristics would give a deeper understanding of users behaviour varying from high to lower degree of likelihood to engage actively on social media

Theoretical Underpinnings & Propositions

In the current scenario, marketers are relying heavily upon social media as a channel of communication with the customers, however not much is known about how the branding message content is to be fabricated to maximise customers' engagement. Customers' psychological engagement depends upon needs, goals and motives of the customer (Keller, 2009) and is important as customers are not just passive recipients of information but actively participate in information sharing (Schmitt, 2012).

Huang et al. (2013) in their study on viral video advertising, emphasised that *attitude towards the content* is the main driver that makes a customer share it, on social media. The extent to which customers engage with a brand depends upon the kind of branding content shared. Mangold & Faulds, (2009) in their study discuss that social

media has an interactive aspect along with an interpersonal dimension, thus informational influences may go in favour or against the brand, based on the level of consumer's engagement. Most probably consumers get engaged with posts/reviews that are not clearly commercial and have an element of emotional sentiment (Swani et. al. 2013).

Consumers prefer brands which they can discuss on social networking sites to create a positive self-image (Schau & Gilly, 2003). Customer engagement is influenced by the purpose and format of the content, as de Vries et al. (2012) in their research found that posts that lack interactive and multisensory elements draw lesser engagement in comparison to the interactive and multisensory posts. Consumers interact and communicate about brands with which they enjoy social relationships and overlapping identities as per the Self Expansion theory. Brands may get adversely affected if the customer feels that the brand image is not consistent with the customer's own identity and this is just a one-sided relationship (Huang & Mitchell, 2014). Posts with photographs attract more of customers' comments, shares and likes (Kim et. al.,2015). Experience-centric content draws a more favourable customer response when the content is organic as compared to promotional/ paid content. When the content is paid, promotional content gives better results than experience centric content (Kim et. al.,2017).

On social media, customers' engagement with the content depends upon how interesting, educational and entertaining the content is. As per the study conducted by Chen and Berger (2016), the importance customers associate with the interestingness of a content/ post depends upon how the information has been acquired. Consumers are more confident in sharing interesting content received from others rather than in sharing content found by themselves. Social Media Industry Report (2013) highlights that marketer's look for more opportunities to expose their potential customers to the brand message to increase clicks on their web pages, improve their search rankings and to increase customer loyalty (Stelzner, 2013). Engaged customers exhibit participation on social media. This participation may be passive, like just reading and using the content or active, which includes behaviour like posting user-generated stories (Hutton & Fosdick, 2011).

Based on the above discussions, the authors draw the following research propositions.

Proposition 1a: Content Characteristics have a significant impact on Customer Engagement.

Impact of Customer Characteristics on Customer Engagement

There are a number of factors that engage customers on social media which include entertainment (Azar et al., 2016, Rohm et al., 2013), acquisition of information (Azar et al., 2016, Berger, 2014), social interaction and influence (Azar et al., 2016, Berger, 2014), and incentives (Schultz and Peltier, 2013, Azar et al., 2016). Kabadayi and Price (2014), in their research studies, took the personality traits perspective to define customer engagement. It was found that openness to experiences and extroversion had a positive relation with customer engagement. On the other side, neuroticism has negative effect on customer engagement. Customers' knowledge about a product category/ brand also impacts their response to social media activities and customers are more engaged. Customers who feel that they are not knowledgeable enough, are vulnerable to "compensatory self-enhancement"; and are thus driven to share content signalling a higher level of knowledge.

Ozguven et al., (2013) in their study, suggested that social media is used more by the people who are conscientious, are open to experiences, and the ones who are more satisfied with their lives. Moreover, people who are educated and have high income levels are high social media users. This study further highlighted that extraversion, neuroticism and agreeableness do not affect social media usage. Gender has no impact on customer social media usage rate. Shao and Ross (2015) took a lifecycle viewpoint of customer engagement and suggested that initially a customer joins a community on social media, to interact with and meet people and gather information. However, entertainment becomes a major motivation as individuals grow familiar with the community. Later, engagement depends upon the need to know more about the brand and its various products.

Proposition 1b: Customer characteristics has a significant impact on Customer Engagement.

Impact of Source Credibility on Customer Engagement

Marketer Generated Content (MGC) is the content generated on social media by the marketers on behalf of their firms, while the content (posts/ reviews) shared by

customers on social media is called User Generated Content (UGC). As both consumers and marketers simultaneously engage on social media channels, consumers' behavioural intentions often get influenced by the content posted by Users and Marketers. Researchers have attempted to study the role of User Generated Content and Marketer Generated content on customer response (Trusov et al. 2009, Chen and Xie 2008). However, there is very limited empirical evidence on the relative efficiency of User Generated Content and Marketer Generated Content in encouraging consumer purchases, except as pointed by Albuquerque et al. (2012) and Trusov et al. (2009) in their work.

The confusion in the customer minds arises from differences in their motivations, needs and level of cynicism towards Marketer Generated Content (Escalas, 2007). The relative efficacy of MGC and UGC on behavioural intentions is still unclear in the literature, as both MGC and UGC are coupled with two sidedness; the former is overtly positive while the latter can be positive or negative (Godes and Mayzlin 2009). Mayzlin (2006) studied the effectiveness of online word of mouth, which includes both consumer's recommendations and firms' disguised promotions. The research pointed that WOM is more persuasive as compared to the firms' other more overt promotional tools on an online medium. Research shows that for customers, online WOM is more credible, and relevant than MGC (Gruen, et. al., 2006). However, the trustworthiness of the numerous reviews posted online, raises concerns of the online information seekers (Eysenbach, 2000). There is an evidence of prevalent deceptive online user generated content (UGC) which questions the credibility of such content (Ibrahim 2008; Litvin, Goldsmith, and Pan 2008), which points at a need to identify the credibility of User Generated Content as well. This helps the authors arrive at the following research proposition.

Proposition 1c: Source Credibility has a significant impact on Customer Engagement

Impact of Customer Engagement on Customer Response

The affective and cognitive element of customers'/ user's engagement constitute customers' experiences and feelings whereas the behavioural or conative element

includes the active participation by the potential as well as the existing customers, both within and outside of the exchange situations (Vivek et al., 2012).

A popular platform on which customers engage behaviourally with the companies is social media, which 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* (Kaplan et al., 2010). The potential of social media as a platform has been underrated until recently (Woisetschlager et al., 2008), although social media is very suitable for creating relationships with customers (Kane et al., 2009). Several researchers have attempted to explore the motivation of e-WOM by investigating online users' choice to join virtual groups and communities. Ridings and Gefen (2004) pointed that customers join online communities for four reasons which includes the desire to exchange information, for social interaction, for friendship, and for recreation. A few other studies have segregated motivations by the valence of customer engagement behaviour in the offline arena, meagre empirical work has been carried out, regarding the online space. The above discussions help in the formulation of the following propositions.

Proposition 2a: Customer Engagement has a direct and positive impact on Information Usage.

Proposition 2b: Customer Engagement has a direct and positive impact on Information Sharing.

Mediating Effect of Customer Engagement

Content characteristics, Customer characteristics, and source credibility on a social media community can influence the level of user's engagement, resulting in Information Sharing and Usage by the users. Better Content (relevance/interestingness), Customer's characteristics (personality traits/ attachment to social media), and source credibility (MGC credibility/ UGC credibility) engage customers on social media and develop a sense of belongingness with the online community. This kind of a sense of attachment and belongingness brings pleasing emotional experiences to customers which results in sharing of information in both online and offline settings (Kumar, De Matos & Rossi, 2008; Petersen, & Leone, 2007). Subsequently, the authors arrive at the following propositions.

Proposition3a: Customer Engagement mediates the relation between Content Characteristics and Information Usage

Proposition3b: Customer Engagement mediates the relation between Content Characteristics and Information Sharing

Proposition4a: Customer Engagement mediates the relation between Customer Characteristics and Information Usage

Proposition4b: Customer Engagement mediates the relation between Customer Characteristics and Information Sharing

Proposition5a: Customer Engagement mediates the relation between Source Credibility and Information Usage

Proposition5b: Customer Engagement mediates the relation between Source Credibility and Information Sharing

Figure 1 summarises the above discussion in the form of a conceptual model, which can be used to study the impact of content characteristics, customer characteristics and source credibility on information usage and information sharing, wherein consumer engagement is the mediating variable.

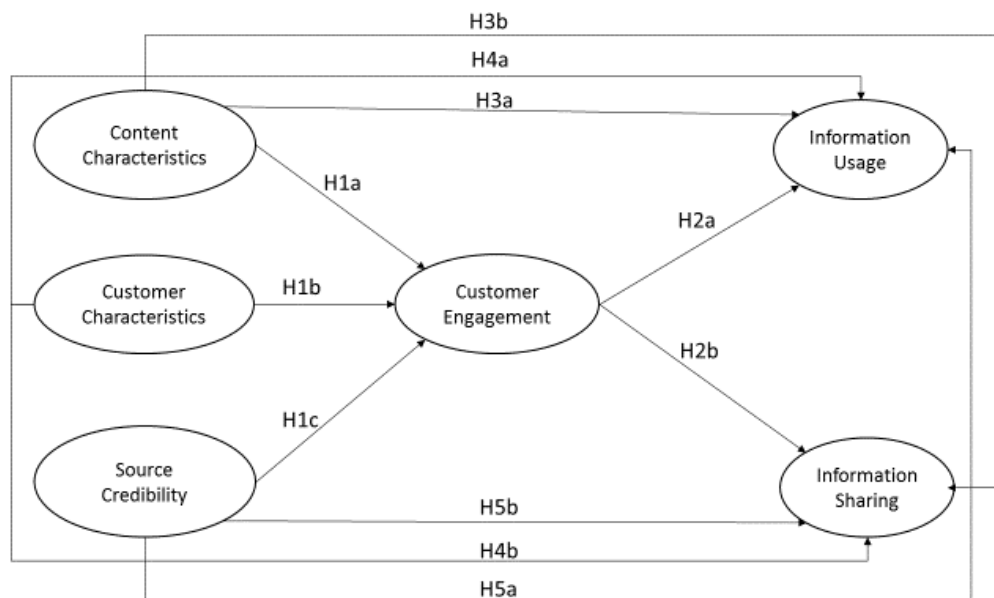


Figure 1. Proposed Model for this Study

MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

This study proposes a conceptual model that tries to examine the effect of user characteristics, quality and type of content shared on social media-based communities and credibility of the source on customer response. The research study also intends to inspect the role of consumer engagement as a mediating variable.

A qualitative or quantitative validation of this model can help marketers in micro targeting their customers and accordingly eliciting desired customer response, like making travel plans based on the reviews posted on the online travel communities and posting their travel experiences on social media for others to follow. The qualitative validation can be done using Netnography-an online research technique which involves participation of the researcher in an online community and development of inferences through observation and participation in a contextual environment. A quantitative validation will involve developing a research instrument to conduct survey-based research, data collection and empirical analysis to support the above propositions.

Managers in the tourism industry can vary the type of social media content that they are hosting on their online communities to elicit the desired responses from consumers. They can also study consumer characteristics, to find ways to segment consumers and target them separately, with different promotional strategies. Similarly, managers can also work on enhancing perceived source credibility to induce favourable responses from the consumer communities.

FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

To gain insights on how various organizations in the tourism industry can create a virtual community that is able to develop customer engagement and sharing of content, further empirical research is needed that may examine the role & characteristics of the content, content creators, and source credibility on customer response. Furthermore, research should be undertaken to better understand and explore traveller's behaviour by examining other variables that may moderate the relationship between characteristics of the content, content creators, and source credibility and customer response.

More over netnography as a research approach may be undertaken to examine the discourse between the community members and understand the hidden intricacies of users' involvement in a social media-based community. Further empirical research should

be undertaken to explore the nature of customer engagement (Jahn and Kunz 2012; Brodie et al. 2011), and various kinds of brand communities must be examined to recognize engagement behaviour and its dimensions (Gummerus et al. 2012).

Further research should examine the social media presence of brands on various platforms to identify customer engagement strategies and how they can improve customer engagement. The model developed in this study can be evaluated and verified in other communities and industries. Moreover, the model suggested in the research have customer engagement as a moderator, future studies may explore other variables that may moderate the relationship between characteristics of the content, content creators, and source credibility on customer response.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Social Media will continue to be a popular medium of communication in years to come. The UGC posted on social media-based communities is playing an important role in shaping and influencing consumer behaviour, as it is considered as an unprejudiced source of information and will continue to influence the way various products and service organizations will plan their communication strategy.

This paper initially reviews the available literature on User Engagement and User response (content creation and content usage) and attempts to analyse the impact of three factors namely user characteristics, content credibility and source credibility on user response and whether user engagement mediates the relationship between these 2 sets of variables.

In the available literature on 'online communities' most of studies have not explored the users' behaviour. Thus, the reviews suggest that the user's behaviour on online communities must be analysed in an extensive way through pragmatic research carried out, on online community participation.

This study has formulated a theoretical framework that can help the tourism industry in garnering a better understanding of the user's content creation and usage on the social media communities. This may also help in micro targeting users as per their characteristics and classifying them into content creators/ users. The framework uses user engagement as a mediating variable between User Characteristics, Content Characteristics, Source Credibility and Customer Response.

In the last few decades there is an increasing need for companies to keep a track on the information shared online on various social media-based communities as it may work as a source of real time feedback from the consumers. The travel communities on social media are likely to gain more popularity in the years to come (Sparks & Browning, 2011). There is a rich pool of data that travellers post on such communities, this data can be extracted, and analysed to take fruitful decisions. Thus, the Tourism Industry needs to work in building a clear and effective strategy on identifying and using information posted on such communities.

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