

Influencing Role of Social Media in Customer's Decision Making while Selecting a Hotel - A Study of Gurugram

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Abstract

Social Media has become an important promotional tool for hospitality industry. Lately, social media is being used by a large number of consumers to connect with others, to communicate and to share information on their experiences. Considering the resilient influence of social media on internet users, it is imperative to apprehend its role for hotel trades, particularly the online facet of lodging setups. The objective of the current study is to discover the role of social media in customer's decision making while selecting a hotel. Social media today is playing a very important role for travellers when it comes to gathering of information. The influence of social media is such that it can support throughout the decision making, selection and booking process, as guests begin planning their trips using a search engine, looking on social media for tourism motivation and also analysing online ratings and reviews. All kinds of businesses have turned to social media to discover and associate with their target market and it's a no passing trend. The influencing role of social media in customer decision making process has been approved by the study.

Keywords: Social Media, Decision Making, Hotel, Marketing, Hotel Selection

Introduction

In present times, the role of social media, in planning vacations, has significantly intensified. Social media can be defined as internet-based tools for sharing and discussing information among human beings. Social media has become a major trend that has created a huge impact on the modern day tourism. Social media has, infact, brought a revolution in the lives of people. The decision-making associated with hotel selection has primarily changed. People are no longer informed by

brochures and travel agencies, because social media has replaced traditional media and platforms like *Google*, *Facebook*, *Trip Advisor* has transformed the consumers' hotel decision journey (barbaraneuhofer, 2018). From selecting a destination for vacation to selecting a hotel or resort to stay, people clinch to social media. One of the basic purpose of social media for today's traveller is that of decision making process. A social networking site is basically a significant type of social media which, in general, gives a platform to customers so that they can get connected with each other, irrespective of their location. Social Media today is playing a very important role for travellers when it comes to gathering of information. Prior to social media, people had limited resources to acquire information on products and services. For obtaining hotel information, people used to visit hotel websites, had to call various hotels to get details and hotel reservations were done over the phone or in person. Not only social media plays an important role in people's everyday life and social settings, but social media platforms have also become significant tools in the hotel industry. Social media usage has become so prominent that people use it to share their experiences related to travel, to engage with others, to connect with people from different destinations and to purchase travel-related products and services. Today, the impact of social media has grown tremendously and it has taken a front seat, leaving behind traditional sources of information, as individuals have begun to take assistance from the user-generated content or electronic word of mouth (eWOM) via social media to plan their choice of hotel stay. Advancements in information technology have altered the way individuals and organizations communicate, especially the internet has brought on

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major structural changes in the hotel industry. Web 2.0 has incredibly changed the behaviour of online users. Web 2.0 or social media platforms enable individuals to communicate insights and share information. At present, Facebook is eventual social networking service, positioned on the global reach and total active users. It has around 2.6 billion active users worldwide (Facebook Marketing Report, 2017). As technology evolved over the past era and enriched the accessibility of information, it became easier for internet users to explore and discover facts and figures on the network. In addition to that, as hospitality-related products and services are affluent, consumers, for the most part, collect and investigate information with a specific end goal to border the vulnerability of settling on wrong selections. It is difficult to choose things that consumers have never seen, experienced or not familiar with while selecting/booking accommodations online. Hence, there exist hesitations in gaining access to services and facilities. Trends nowadays are profoundly swayed by information on social media and finds that social media are more dependable as compared to travel agencies. People rest a lot on social media on peer understandings and computer-generated comments as their main source of information for hotel selection. Therefore, the objective of the study is to understand the intention of the consumers of Gurugram towards selection of a hotel based on social media information and also determine the important factors that influence their decision.

Literature Review

The introduction of social networks in the hotel and tourism sector is no longer a matter of choice but rather a matter of need. Social media's increasing influence on various aspects of consumer behaviour including needs recognition, information acquisition, opinions and attitudes, purchase behaviour, post-purchase communication and most importantly evaluation of alternatives cannot be denied (Mangold & Faulds, 2009). Social media refers to a cluster of Internet-based solicitations built on the theoretical and methodical practicalities of Web 2.0 conception. This application allows the formation and alteration of user-generated content and enriches a higher level of social collaboration among vacationers (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). It is important to note that social media has a tremendous impact on the hotel selection process. The traditional way of collecting information about destinations and products

and services that were promoted in brochures and travel agent newsletters were suddenly replaced by the internet where people could easily research on their needs as well as provide feedback in a more efficient manner that is more consolidated. Before the social media boom, travellers shared feedback mostly by word of mouth. Today, consumers use social media for a comprehensive gamut of reasons such as engaging with their friends, posting pictures, sharing videos, writing reviews and comments, sharing their experiences, engaging with online travel agents to get feedback as well as to execute hotel bookings (Vakaris & Neuhofer, 2017). The last two eras have countersigned new information-sharing platforms, such as social media and network commerce, which have surpassed the limits of time and space and ensued in various forms of benefits and expediencies (Al-Smadi et al., 2019). Excavating data from collaborative reviews posted on websites or social media can expansively elucidate the types of products or services that satiate or exasperate consumers (Vinodhini & Chandrasekaran, 2017). Especially for the hospitality area, it is difficult to administer actual conditions about the hotels before vacationers practice them personally because it cannot be gratified like the ingestion of perceptible products (Boo & Busser, 2018). An acceptable hotel selection would be helpful to avoid bad pronouncement and perils that may deteriorate the whole journey (Gavilan et al., 2018). This innovation adequately elucidates the prodigy that more than 80 % of tourists browse comments related to their concerns when selecting hotels (Pelsmacker et al., 2018). As customers' trust in online reviews has been growing, the majority of studies designate that online reviews have an insightful impact from organisation and affordability perceptions (Kauffmann et al., 2019). The e-tourism era has driven a thriving intensification in online bookings and extemporaneously posted reviews after service consumption. Traditional word of mouth had much inferior influence on potential tourists and hotel's business enactment as compared to online reviews and ratings and which also act as electronic word of mouth (Schmunk et al., 2014; Zhao et al., 2019). Such sources provide real evidence about the hotel industry and have become widespread and achievable on a quotidian basis. The leading benefit of numerical ratings is that they can designate tourists' overall consummation in a forthright way (Zhao et al., 2019). Gavilan et al. (2018) analyzed the influence and associations of online rankings and

evaluations on tourists' hotel contemplation. Hu and Chen (2016) discussed the influence of review perceptibility and collaboration between hotel stars and online ratings. The emergent interest in textual reviews has been instigated by the intrinsic structures of online textual reviews, that is, amorphous user-generated contents (Pelsmacker et al., 2018). Berezina et al. (2016) recognised a text-mining insolence to online textual hotel reviews to comprehend gratified and disgruntled hotel consumers. Xu and Li (2016) proposed a text mining method to ascertain the precursors of customer contentment and discontentment toward multiple types of hotels. Park et al. (2018) carried out a sentiment investigation of online feedback comments to examine the revisiting patterns of the customers. Since the growth of social media platforms (e.g., Facebook), online ratings have grown into a key influencer in customer acquisition decisions (Thakur, 2018). That is, social media platforms have, in recent times, redesigned the way firms interact with customers, while customers use social media platforms to nurture and withstand their connotation bonds (Kim et al., 2015). As a prominent social media platform, Facebook assists as a gathering place for a massive clutch of consumers, a mine of consumer substantiation, a means of sprinkling information to form market manifestation (Hsu, 2012), and an effective tool for retrieving customer individualities, such as income, age, and gender, in the hospitality province (Mattila & Liu, 2017). Henceforth, Facebook is a rich foundation of customer information (Liu and Mattila, 2017) and a persuasive arrangement of electronic word-of-mouth in hospitality marketing (Kim et al., 2015). Misopoulos et al. (2014) and Pekar and Ou (2008) analyzed the contents of Twitter to ascertain precarious rudiments of customer service and make auxiliary enhancements using the sentiments contained within these comments. Pekar and Ou (2008) addressed the challenge of recognising customers' sentiments articulated in texts to illustrate their estimations about service quality and hotel locations. More specifically, online textual hotel reviews epitomise tourists' consumption capabilities, highlight product measures, and arrange for widespread understandings and approaches in a nebulous procedure (Zhao et al., 2019). As advocated in the literature, ratings comprise less sentimental substantiation and their submission areas are restricted. However, researchers can capture more real opinions and approaches of tourists to comprehend their

anxieties, contentment, impulses and other negotiating arrangements concerning hotels by overwhelmingly revising online textual reviews, which would contribute to hotel service and competitive enhancements (Philander & Zhong, 2016; Yadav & Roy Choudhury, 2019). Therefore, online textual hotel reviews have recently become more ubiquitous because of their expedient physiognomies in explicitly replicating prolific information about sentimental tendencies of travellers (Geetha et al., 2017; Xiang et al., 2015). A common understanding of tourists' hotel demands recommends that selecting a suitable set of standards is a decisive process in hotel selection (Li et al., 2015). Lockyer (2005) suggested four main measures that have an emotional impact on tourists' hotel selection, namely, place, expense, expediencies, and hygiene. (Merlo & de Souza Joao; 2011) recognised that room size, building type, service distinction, and living vicinities also have perilous effects on tourists' booking intent. Ren et al. (2016) established that four magnitudes may inspire tourists to change their minds, namely, perceptible and sensorial experience, staff performance, aesthetic awareness, and location. Xu and Li (2016) pointed out that the most valuable criteria that may considerably have an emotional impact on tourists' decision are room eminence, staff approach and conduct, location, access, value, and food. Yen and Tang (2019) accurately scrutinised the influence of hotel standards on eWOM performances and provided substantiation to support the applicability of these standards on hotel performance. The literature acclaims that online ratings are one of the paramount trustworthy foundations of consumer assurance in building purchase decisions, which is established on online information derived from social media platforms such as Facebook (Tseng, 2017). In the digital age, consumers progressively contemplate online ratings to be more dependable and upright than traditional sources of information in learning about products and services (Ivanova & Scholz, 2017). For example, Hernández-Ortega (2018) observed that 88% of consumers read and use online reviews, blogs and social information to make their purchase decisions. This shows that online ratings are valuable sources for consumers, as they can access information about products for making decisions (Pan et al., 2018). In the hotel framework, online ratings facilitate customers to gather information about hotel amenities and facilities in a functional nature, as they can equate prices and make their travel journeys at

a desktop without getting in touch with the hotel's sales representative (Bilgihan & Bujisic, 2015). Online ratings are therefore an expedient display of customers forming premeditated resolution. According to Leung et al. (2013), Facebook is highly used in tourism. The previous study has mentioned that it is the emotional and informational appeal of Facebook that has a significant impact on hotels (Cervellon & Galipienzo, 2015). Facebook revealed that 4% of customers purchased something within four weeks after being exposed to advertisements from a retailer. Individuals are positively influenced by the effective advertising campaigns as posted on Facebook and are prompted to purchase the products and services (Lee & Watkins, 2016). In this context, a significant role is being played by Facebook advertising, as after watching specific videos containing promotional material, potential customers may relate to the lifestyles that are displayed and purchase the products (Smith et al., 2012; Oliveira & Casais, 2019). The concept of reviews posted on Facebook has developed significantly to reflect individuals' need to connect to specific brands. Potential customers relate directly to the videos since they perceive such medium in a positive light due to the solid aspect of personalization. Facebook videos are mostly preferred by individuals from the age group 18-34. In this way, more than 65% of consumers turn out to be influenced by the respective videos to make purchases. Individuals influenced by this social media platform further impact the consumer decisions of others around them (Cox & Park, 2014). It has been indicated that viewers tend to accept advertisements on a hotel facebook page more readily as compared to a hotel website (Sabapathy & Selvakumar, 2018). Moreover, Facebook users also consider the advantages of viewing branded video content on a daily basis, which prompts them to make purchase decisions. It is important to note the aspect of engagement on these social media platforms (Abitbol & Lee, 2017). From this perspective, it should be pointed out that Facebook still leads when it comes to the precise number of individuals who tend to be engaged in promotional video content (Khan, 2017). Just like Facebook, the increasing influence of Instagram on customer's hotel decision making cannot be denied. With more than 400 million active users and nearly 80 million photos shared on the platform daily, Instagram has become the fastest-growing major social network platform in the U.S. (Pew, 2015). Instagram allows users to take photos, enhance them with filtering

technology, share them with followers, and comment or "like" other users' photos. The ability to create high-quality photos is a unique feature of Instagram (Lee et al., 2015). Based on the original purpose of Instagram - for users to be able to share their life stories through photos - previous research has suggested that social interaction is one of the main motivations for Instagram use (Geurin-Eagleman & Burch, 2016; Pittman, & Reich, 2016; Ridgway & Clayton, 2016). For instance, Pittman (2015) demonstrates that individuals are less likely to feel lonely because of their positive attitude towards Instagram. Similar to the motivations for using Facebook and Twitter, social interaction plays a critical role in using Instagram (Lee et al., 2015). In other words, the major motivational factor underlying Instagram use is forming and upholding social relationships (Lee et al., 2015). Instagram, which primarily assisted as a media for online photography, progressed meritoriously in advertising, promotion, marketing, distribution ideas/goods and providing information services which are firm, specific and perfect (Hoffman & Novak, 1996; Doolin et al., 2002; Sweeney, 2000). More than 95 million photos and videos are posted every day on Instagram (Brooke, 2017). Instagram offers an image-based storytelling capability, more than any other platform (Mancuso & Stuth, 2015). Evidence on social media is used as a parameter for future consumptions or for planning future trips (Patarawadee, 2015.) In tourism, consumers' behavior has always been influenced by the development of information. 48% of users who want to choose destinations for their next getaway, according to a survey conducted on Instagram, use it as an influence. Thirty-five percent of them use the platform to get inspired and discover new places. (Cohen, 2015). Instagram magnifies the customer's capability to share travel experiences with a wider audience than ever before. Many hotels, resorts and restaurants have also used this advantage to reach out to their customers by using Instagram as a marketing tool or by using an influencer to market their business. From that, they can get reviews, feedbacks and improve their customer services. According to research made by Joshi (2013) on indianluxurytrains.com, 91% of travellers from around the world make their bookings based on online reviews and 51% of travellers write their comments online. Travellers in the new digital world are being active on social media and online. It is the new trend for future development of tourism industry. Internet is being browsed by people for travel inspiration

and validation from their Instagram hash-tags, where they can find all the related pictures about the hotel selection to get inspiration. Thus, it can be indicated that such social media websites have become the most substantial influencer of buying decisions. More and more consumers rely on social media to strengthen their buying decisions. In this way, the respective social media platforms serve as a solid medium promoting long term, personalized relationship between customers and brands.

Objectives

- To find out the role of social media in consumer's decision making while selecting a hotel.
- To examine the factors that influence the decision of consumers.

Research Methodology

Research Design: The research paper adopted an exploratory study method in studying what sort of perception was made regarding the influencing role of social media. The collected data was in qualitative as well as a quantitative form to know the proper and efficient outcome of such data. The primary data was collected through the questionnaire, and the secondary data was obtained from sources like websites, magazines and books.

Target Population & Sample Selection: The population as well as the universe that was targeted and selected for the study focused on the people residing in Gurugram city. A well-organized questionnaire was developed to analyse the perceptions of people on the role that social media plays in their decision making while selecting a hotel.

Data Analysis: Data was collected through an online survey. Questionnaires were sent to 120 people, but only 110 questionnaires were considered for analysis while 10 were rejected due to error. A Statistical mechanism such as graphical presentation is applied to primary data collected for further analysis.

Analysis and Interpretation

Demographic Profile

Table 1: Distribution of Sample According to Demographic Characteristics (N=110)

	Number	Percentage
<i>Age</i>		
18-21	6	5.5%
22-30	24	21.8%
31-40	30	27.3%
Above 40	50	45.5 %
<i>Gender</i>		
Male	77	70 %
Female	33	30 %
<i>Marital Status</i>		
Married	80	72.7%
Unmarried	30	27.3%
<i>Qualification</i>		
Graduate	36	32.7%
Post-Graduate	42	38.2%
Professional	22	20%
Other	10	9.1%
<i>Monthly Income</i>		
Between 20000-30000	40	36.4%
Between 30000-40000	10	9.1%
Between 40000-50000	15	13.6%
Above 50000	45	40.9%

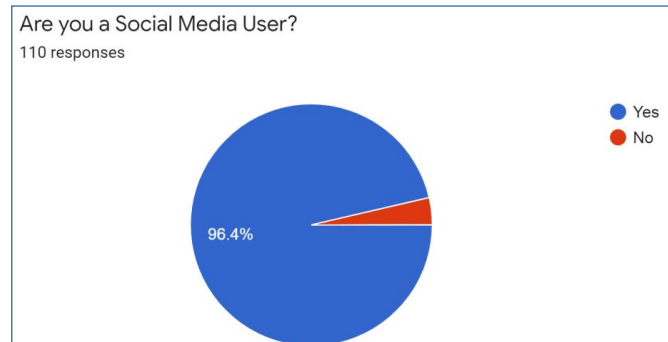


Fig. 1: Social Media User

Fig. 1 depicts the number of social media users. Out of 110 respondents, 96.4% of respondents were found to be social media users while remaining 3.6% of respondents were not.

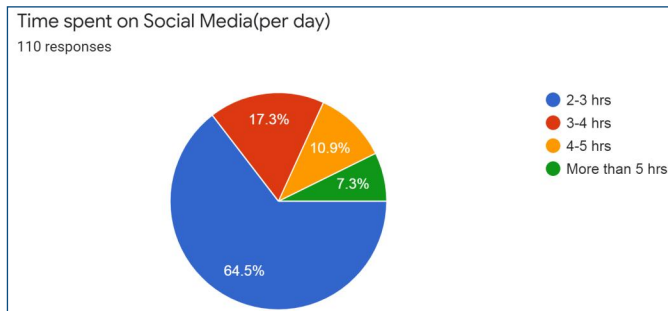


Fig. 2: Time Spent on Social Media

Fig. 2 shows the no. of hours spent by the respondents on social media per day. 64.5% respondents spend 2-3 hours per day on social media, 17.3% respondents spend 3-4 hours on social media, 10.9% respondents spend 4-5 hours and 7.3% respondents spend more than 5 hours per day on social media.

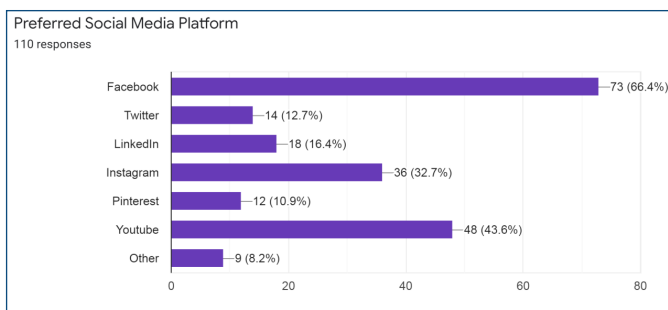


Fig. 3: Preferred Social Media Platforms

Fig. 3 represents the preferred social media platform by the respondents. A large number of respondents, 66.4% prefer Facebook, 43.6% respondents prefer Youtube, 32.7% of respondents prefer Instagram, 16.4% of respondents prefer LinkedIn, 12.7% of respondents prefer twitter and 10.9% of respondents prefer Pinterest as their preferred social media platform, while the remaining 8.2% of respondents prefer some other social media platform.

Fig. 4 depicts the number of respondents who have searched social media for obtaining the hotel information before booking the hotel. Out of 110 respondents, 78.2% of respondents have actually searched social media for

hotel information while the remaining 21.8% have not searched social media.

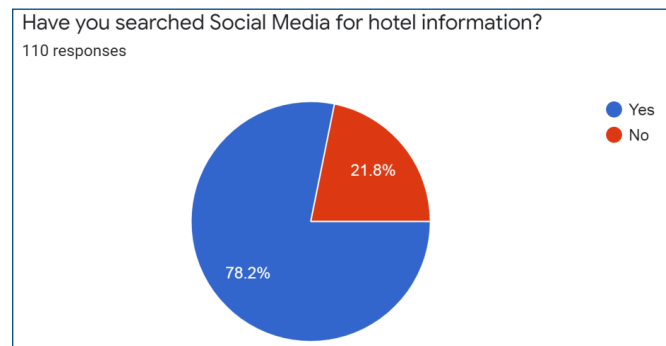


Fig. 4: Search Social Media about Hotel Information

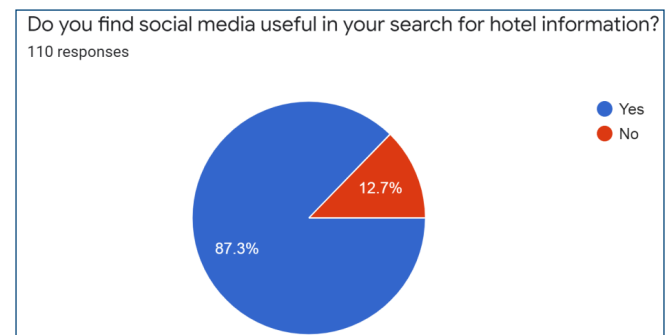


Fig. 5: Social Media Useful for Hotel Information

Fig. 5 shows that 87.3% of respondents have found social media to be useful in their search for hotel information while 12.7% of respondents were of a different opinion and do not find social media to be useful in their search for hotel information.

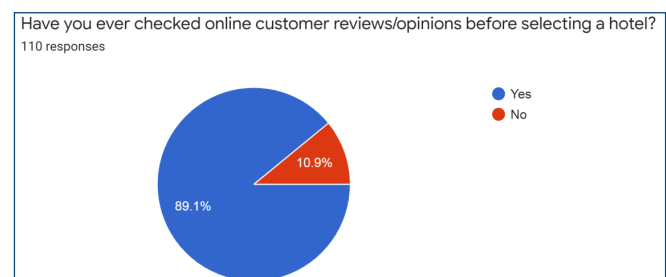


Fig. 6: Checked Online Customer Reviews/Opinion

Fig. 6 depicts that 89.1% of respondents check online customer reviews/opinions before selecting a hotel while 10.9% respondents do not check online customer reviews/opinions before selecting a hotel.

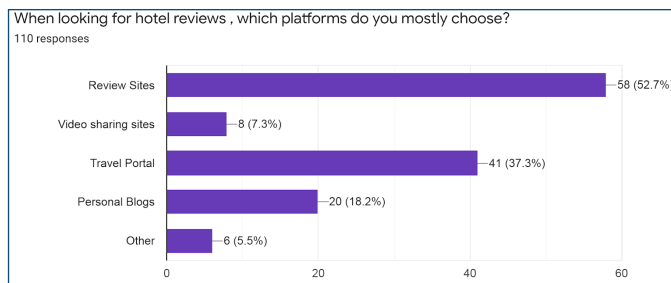


Fig. 7: Platforms for Hotel Reviews

Fig. 7 depicts various platforms that respondents choose while looking for hotel reviews before finally selecting a hotel. 52.7% respondents prefer review sites, 37.3% respondents prefer travel portals, 18.2% respondents prefer personal blogs, 8 respondents prefer video sharing sites and 5.5% respondents prefer other platforms when looking for hotel reviews.

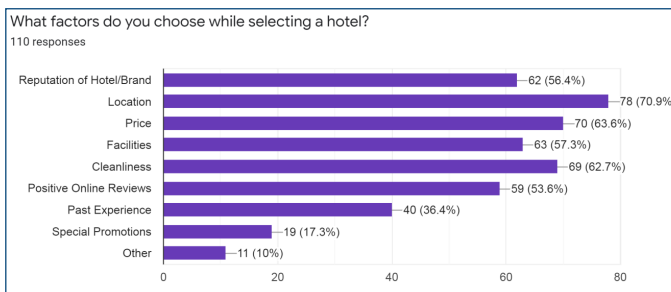


Fig. 8: Factors to Choose while Selecting a Hotel

Fig. 8 represents various factors that influence the customer's decision while selecting a hotel. 70.9% of respondents prefer location while selecting a hotel. 63.6% of respondents prefer the price of the room as an important factor while selecting a hotel, 62.7% of respondents prefer cleanliness as an important factor in the selection of a hotel. 57.3% of respondents prefer the facilities as an important factor. 56.4% respondents prefer reputation of the brand, 53.6% respondents prefer positive online reviews while selecting a hotel, 36.4% respondents prefer past experience, 17.3% of respondents prefer special promotions and 10% respondents prefer other factors while selecting a hotel.

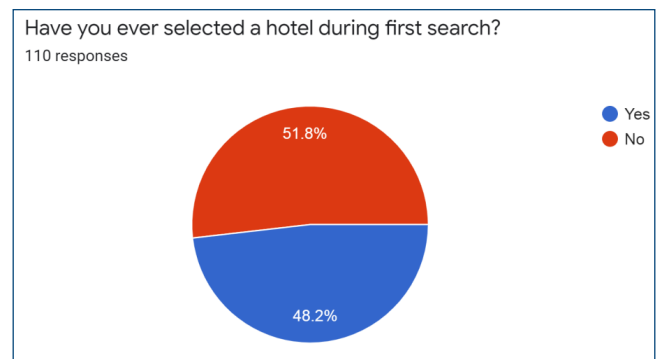


Fig. 9: Selected a Hotel during First Search

Fig. 9 represents that 51.8% of respondents have selected hotels for booking during their first search while 48.2% of respondents did not select a hotel during their first search.

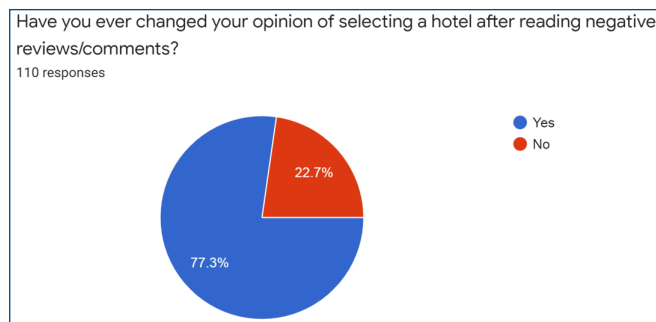


Fig. 10: Changing Opinion after Negative Review/Comments

Fig. 10 depicts that 77.3% of respondents changed their opinion of booking a hotel after reading a negative review / comment about a hotel while 22.7% of respondents did not change their opinion after reading a negative comment/review.

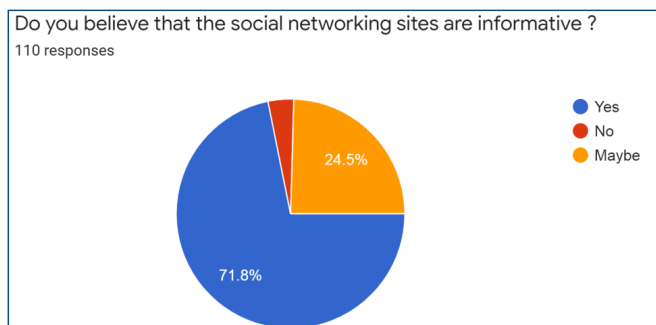


Fig. 11: Social Networking Sites are Informative

Fig. 11 shows that 71.8% of respondents find social media sites to be informative, 3.7% of respondents do not find social media sites to be informative while the remaining 24.5% of respondents are not sure if the social media sites are informative or not.

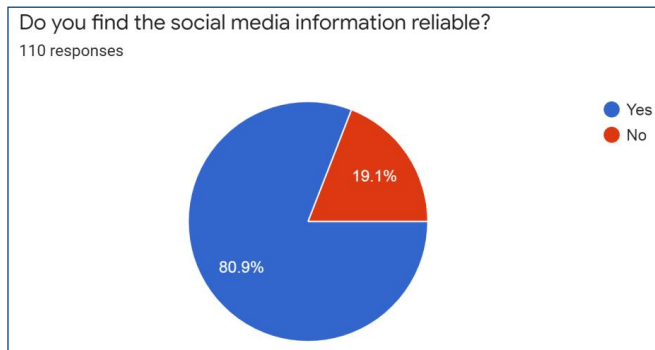


Fig. 12: Reliability of Social Media Information

Fig. 12 depicts that 89 respondents find the information on social media reliable while 21 respondents do not find social media information reliable.

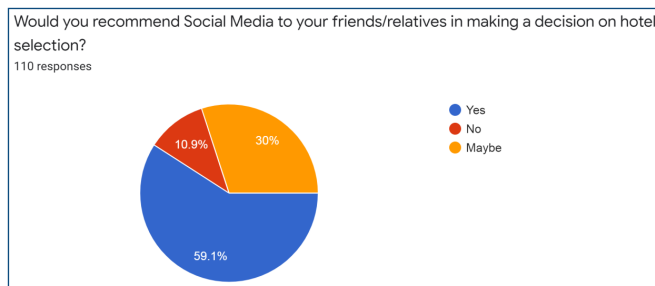


Fig. 13: Recommend Social Media to your Friends/Relatives in Making a Decision on Hotel Selection

Fig. 13 represents that 65 respondents would recommend social media to their friends/relatives in making a decision on hotel selection, 12 respondents would not recommend social media to their friends/relatives and the remaining 33 respondents are not sure if they would make a recommendation to their friends/relatives on choosing social media for selecting a hotel.

Findings

The objective of this research paper was to find out the influencing role of social media in customer decision making while selecting a hotel and also to examine the

factors that influence the decision of customers. The demographic profile of respondents is shown in Table 1. From 110 respondents, 70% are male and 30% are female. The majority of participants, 45.5% are above the age of 40. In terms of educational background, about 38.2% hold a master's degree. About 40.9% reported a monthly salary of above 50 thousand rupees, indicating that most of the respondents are financially sufficient for travelling. More than 90% of respondents are social media users (96.4%), and less than 30% have never booked a hotel online (21.8%). A large number of respondents, around 87.3% find social media information useful in their search for hotel information and around 89.1% of respondents check online reviews/comments before selecting a hotel. Review sites are stated by the respondents as the most preferred (52.7%) or having the best experience for hotel booking. Out of 110 respondents, 37.3% of respondents tend to book via a Travel portal. It is followed by 18.2% of respondents choosing Personal blogs and 7.3% of respondents choosing video sharing sites. The most important factors that influence the decision making of the customers are location (chosen by 70.9% respondents) and cleanliness (chosen by 62.7% respondents) while other respondents chose reputation of the brand (56.4%), and positive online reviews (53.6%).

Conclusion

The findings reveal that social media plays an important role in affecting the way consumers search, decide and book hotels. It also suggests that social media helps consumers in collecting information about products and services, assessing alternatives and making their choices. Social media's intensifying significance in the tourism and hotel industry cannot be denied.

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