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Research Paper

Tourism destination marketing and information technology in Ghana

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ABSTRACT

A research model was developed to investigate the relationships between intention to visit and tourists' satisfaction as a source of mediation for travelers through information search and e-word of mouth. A judgmental sampling technique and a sample questionnaire survey of 350 respondents were involved in the research measurement. The finding of the analytical results indicates that the dimensions of tourists' satisfaction as a mediator affect the overall tourists' intention to visit. Simple websites no longer have an impact on destination marketing because of the advance in technology. Websites should provide different tools and marketing channels to facilitate the surfing and information needs of tourists. The research used the instruments of online word of mouth and information search by modifying the theory of planned behavior to consider the context of intention to visit. Valuable information for managers and researchers interested in the internet and online destination marketing is essential.

1. Introduction

The purpose of this study is to use the internet to market tourism products and service to online destination markets (Morrison, 2013). Smartphones, laptops, iPads, tablets and desktop computers have become indispensable components of the daily lives' of people. The possession of computers among travelers has increased the consumption of the internet through marketing channels at various tourism destinations (Gröne, Friedrich, Holbling, & Peterson, 2009; Rogers & Davidson 2015). Communications and promotions through internet have increased the popularity of online technology (Shankar, Venkatesh, Hofacker, & Naik, 2010). The features in smartphones, laptops and desktop computers enable customers to purchase tourism products at different destinations, access and share information freely that impacts the pattern of communications in the tourism industry (Sultan & Rohm, 2009). With the help of the internet, customers can visit websites to interact, review and purchase tourism products. Attractive websites include graphical images, shapes, animations, fonts and complete layout of destinations to encourage customer retention (Li & Yeh, 2010). Quality websites (Vance, ELie-Dit-Cosque, & Straub, 2008) impact customers experience while interacting and using the website (Chung, 2015; Wells, Valacich, & Hess, 2011).

Websites should be easy to navigate and user friendly (O'Brien & Toms, 2008). Previous empirical research revealed that the internet purchasing behavior of customers differs based on user friendliness of websites and the perceptions of online buying behavior

of tourism products (Kim & Stoel, 2004). Recommendations from Leung, Lee, and Lawa (2011) propose that websites should have irresistible features appeal to customers. It was further suggested that properly designed characteristics of good websites add excitement, emotional satisfaction and signals positive engagement for customers to visit frequently to purchase tourism products. The most important things tourists look for on websites is the easier-to-use design hallmarks, logical navigations and logical dropdown menus. Internet purchasing behavior and transaction requires commitment and formal assurance Bigné, Hernández, Ruiz, and Andreu (2010). These include searching for special target tourism services and valuable tourism products that satisfy customers' selection needs, evaluation requirement, ordering focus, and payment and delivering among different available options. Due to severe competition among various destination markets around the globe, it will be proficient to maintain an attractive and efficient website with the guarantee to provide preventive measures of vulnerability security problems and risk free to attract and retain more customers.

2. Literature review

The research of Goodrich (2011) revealed that computers make it easy to for goods and services to be bought and sold on the internet. This was similarly supported by Xu and McGehee (2012) on the notion that businesses are transacted online by using computer networks. All types of business are supported by internet marketing and web

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technologies. The studies of Zhang et al. (2011) propose that the use of internet to transact business reduces cost and increases sales considerably. It was further suggested that websites promotional posting and advertisement on the internet can be reached by tourists across the world and even to the smallest village in a remote area (Luo, Ba, & Zhang, 2012). Information on the internet about tourism destinations is searchable because of the availability of internet. Knowledge of the internet has an important impact on the buying of tourism products and services. The tourism industries around the globe have experienced the significant influence of information technology as a platform for search engines that impact the general performance of tourism activities online (Büttcher et al., 2016). Smartphones are used for the payment of bills through the internet that include mobile payment systems for e-service quality. The purchasing of tourism products and services through internet includes wireless handsets, personal digital assistants and smartphones. Smartphones are gaining popularity in the tourism industry because of the advantage of using them wirelessly anywhere (Dahlberg, Mallat, Ondrus & Zmijewska, 2006). Various tourism researchers designed conceptual research models and used theories related with intention to buy and visit behavior.

The theories include the theory of reasoned action (TRA), the technology acceptance model and the theory of planned behavior (Shin, 2010). The theory of reasoned action was hypothesized to explore the relationship between point of views and behavior intentions (Jalilvand & Samiei, 2012). The influence of behavior intention is noticed in tourists when planning to purchase tourism products and service. Attitude toward tourism destination marketing can occur through social influence and online word of mouth. This can either impact the tourists' thinking capacity to purchase the products or decline based on their belief and evaluations (Bagozzi & Yi, 1988). In the present world of internet and semiotic society, destination images impact tourists' intention to visit tourism destinations. Researchers in the hospitality industry propose that signs, images, and symbols present fetishistic qualities that inspire tourists' psychological response to destination marketing on the internet. Tourism academicians reveal that e-word of mouth is a communication channel that has influence in the online destination marketing (Blazevic et al., 2013). Online word of mouth has more credibility than word of mouth because it is perceived by tourists as unbiased. The broader use of internet has made it easier for e-word of mouth and circulation of information among potential customers. Tourists review websites, discussion forums, weblogs and social network websites as a platform for e-word of mouth to be experienced among millions of customers. It has been revealed that the relevant literature about e-word of mouth is focused on communication (Chevalier & Mayzlin, 2006; Davis & Khazanchi, 2008). This further suggests that the extent to which research studies have been published on e-word of mouth, is cross-disciplinary and has no any formal conclusion. The research on the e-word of mouth phenomenon is classified into two categories. Marketing analysis and individual analysis (Tan & Wu, 2016). The marketing systematic investigation is based on the sales of products and services while the individual examination is focused on e-word of mouth as an influence on personal level. The marketing procedure permits senders of messages as e-word of mouth to influence the receivers of the messages (Doh & Hwang, 2009; Gauri, Bhatnagar, & Rao, 2008; Vas, 2017) and impact their behavior towards visiting the destination marketing. The individual analysis through e-word of mouth is a communication between a sender and a receiver. The sender sends messages on the internet about products and services (Cheung, Lee, & Thadani, 2009; Gupta & Harris, 2010) based on his experience as a process of personal influence to change the mind of the receivers of the messages towards buying or visiting the tourism destinations.

3. The contribution

Internet based consumer discussion is the virtual environments

tourists use to share views and opinions. This has resulted to a new way of communication regarded as e-word of mouth. The difference between online word of mouth and word of mouth is that e-word of mouth is based on the internet while word of mouth is from person to person without internet involvement. Online word of mouth provides insights for academicians and practitioner to discuss online forums. Based on this, website designers and administrators can efficiently design and manage the forum discussions to evaluate and facilitate their credibility for readers. This study is designed to test a conceptual research model that investigates the relations between information searching, e-service qualities, e-word of mouth and tourist satisfaction with intention to visit behavior. The model tests tourist satisfaction as a full mediation of the effects of intention to visit, information searching, e-service quality and e-word of mouth. The result of the meta-analysis demonstrates that information searching and e-word of mouth appears to be strongly associated with the intention to visit than e-quality service. This study is therefore focused on tourists' satisfaction based on the theory of planned behavior (Assaker & Hallak, 2013; Alén, Nicolau, Losada, & Domínguez, 2014). The examination of the aforementioned mentioned relations indicates that this study completes the various gaps in the tourism literature. Firstly, previous empirical research demonstrated that information searching and e-word of mouth are the influential variables of intention to visit (Hung & Patrick, 2012). Secondly, research based on data collection from samples collected in developing countries in the tourism marketing literature is negligible (Getz, 2012). In the present study, the above-mentioned relationships were tested using data collected from hotels and guest houses in Ghana. Thirdly, the success of the empirical studies on tourists' satisfaction on intention to visit in the tourism literature depended on data collection at one point in time. This type of data collection is likely to common bias problems (Podsakoff et al., 2003). Temporal separation with two weeks' time apart between the measurements of both the independent and dependent variables was used in this study. Visitors from the 4-star hotels, 3-star hotels and the guest houses via intention to visit, tourists' satisfaction, information searching, e-service quality and e-word of mouth were estimated through data collection from relevant visitors.

3.1. Conceptual research model

As shown in Fig. 1 the conceptual research model is made up of many relationships. Tourist satisfaction impacts information searching, e-service quality and e-word of mouth positively. Tourist satisfaction has full mediation with the above mentioned variables through the intention to visit. Age, gender, marital status, education and job tenure are regarded as control variables in this research work. They may have significant influence on the study variables and the relationships.

3.2. Direct effects

Destination selection among tourists is very important to governments, tour operators and tourism organizations. The environments that receive a large number of tourists during tourism periods influence the creation of temporal jobs and economic impact of the destination. Various researches with intention to visit among tourists focuses on economic factors of temporal jobs creation, paying taxes to governments for the development of the environments and the attraction of more visitors to settings (Lee, Morrison, & O'leary, 2006). This research therefore seems worthwhile to explore the impact of the void in the social variable of which tourists' satisfaction with intention to visit depend on discussion forums. When customers are satisfied with destinations online interactive variables, their intentions to visit becomes easier to select and targeting luxury tourism products and environments to vacate becomes encouraging. However, when customer satisfaction towards interactive variables diminishes, their intention to visit is directed towards the other destinations of interest causing the intention to visit a particular destination to disappear

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