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Engaging with Customer Using Social Media Platform: A Case Study of Malaysia Hotels

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Abstract

Social media is gaining its popularity among hotel operators as one of the important platforms to market their facilities and establish relationship with customers. In general, most of previous studies that examine this topic focuses on the effects of using social media among hotel operators (i.e., electronic words of mouth); and examine the adoption issue of this platform. However not much of attention given towards understanding how hotels are utilizing this platform to engage with their customers. This study aims to understand the implementation, challenges and technique used to measure the level of engagement using social media platform among hotel operators in Malaysia. This study adopts a qualitative case study approach and the data are collected using a semi-structured interviewing technique. The data were analyzed using content analysis technique. In general, the results indicated that five-star hotels in Malaysia is not utilizing Facebook platform at its fullest potentials. Hotel operators are having challenges in maintaining the level of engagement with the customers and above all, hotel operators in Malaysia does not have good knowledge on how to measure their level of engagement with the customers. This study ended with suggestions on how to measure customer level of engagement using Facebook platform and discussion related to research limitations.

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1. Introduction

The emergent of social media technologies have benefited hotel operators in promoting their hotel locally and internationally. Nowadays, travellers are passionate to share their travel and vacation experiences on the social media platform. They shared not only positive comments, but also negative comments based on their vacation experiences [1]. Social media is becoming an important tool used to assist travellers in planning their vacations [2]. Through social media platform, a traveller can gather information about travel's destination, accommodation, tour and attractions/promotions [3,4]. Besides benefiting travellers, social media technologies are helping hotel operators engage with current and potential customers [5,6]. Through social media, hotel operators can understand the needs of their customers and compete against their competitors better [7,8,9]. Despite the advantages of this platform, hotel operators are also exposed to the negative effects of this online platform if it is not managed effectively. For instance, allowing questions or feedback unattended for some period of times indicate that the hotel operators are not serious in listening to what the customers are telling them [10]. This on the other hands will turn to negative words of mouth that might affect the hotel's reputation. In this study, customer engagement is defined as communication between customers and hotels operators using social media. Understanding how hotel engage with their customer is important as it is one of the critical approach to ensure continuous relation with customer using social media platform [11]. This continuous relationship is important towards ensuring hotel operator's online presence and sustainability [12].

From the literature analysis, it shows that most of previous studies that examine social media in tourism and hospitality domain are mainly focusing on the effects of using social media platform (i.e., electronic word of mouth). Besides that, previous studies are also directed towards examining the adoption issue related to this platform. Despite all the attention given, very few study focuses on understanding how hotels are utilising this platform to engage with their customers. This lack of focus has led to the used of social media platform by customers to share negative experiences after visiting hotel in Malaysia [1]. These negative comments should be handled carefully through proper engagement between hotel operators and customers. This claim has interested this research to examine how do hotel operators in Malaysia manage their social media platform? What are the challenges hotel operators in Malaysia are facing when managing this platform? And how do hotel operators in Malaysia measure their level of engagement with their customers using this platform? Thus, by examining these research questions, this study can fill in the gap by providing a better understanding about the utilisation of social media platform among hotel operators in Malaysia towards establishing better customer engagement.

This paper is organised as follow. The first (this) section outlines the research motivations. The second section discusses the literature reviews related to the topic of this study. The third section discusses the research method. The fourth section presents the research findings. The final section concludes by addressing the contributions of this study.

2. Previous studies on social media in hotel

The proliferation of social media usage among hotel operators has dramatically changed how hotel produce, market and deliver their products/services and communicate both internally and externally with their customers [13]. The adoption of this technology seems to be inevitable because of the benefits that it provides [14] and becoming crucial to hotel industry [15]. Social media is becoming one of the valuable marketing tools among hotel operators [16]. About seventy-five percent of hotels are using social media for marketing purposes and Facebook and Twitter have been identified as the top two social media tools used by hotel operators. Through social media, hotels are disseminating information, promotion sales and attracting potential and returning customers. Hotels are coming out with many innovative ways to promote their hotel using social media [17]. Many researchers concluded that online user reviews through social media have a persuasive impact on online sale for hotels (e.g., [18], [19]). Besides acting as a marketing tool, social media is also used as one of the main communication channels for the hotel to connect with existing and potential customers online [20, 21]. Social media is used as a communication medium for hotels to understand customer's needs and try to provide the best of services by the hotel to customers [22].

In general, it can be concluded that most of the previous studies that focused on this topic mainly concentrated on the adoption issue (e.g., understanding user's perception to adopt social media) ([23], [24]), examining the value of information shared on social media by hotel operators [25]; understanding the effects of word of mouth created using social media and analyzing the level of usage among hotel operators [26]. However, how hotel operators are operating

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