

EXPLORING THE ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA TO ENGAGE FESTIVAL ATTENDEE

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ABSTRACT

Festivals bring people together, and the experiences of festivalgoers may have a profound effect on those who hear about them; hence, social media is an ideal medium through which to spread the word. This study aimed to examine the role of social media in influencing festival attendance. Our aim in doing this research was to learn more about the role that social media plays in attracting festival-goers. This article describes and analyses how festivals use social media, with a focus on how this practice relates to the festivals' goals in terms of building relationships with attendees. A total of 446 festival organizers responded to a survey covering topics such as demographics, logistics, social media, and patron participation. The findings show a correlation between customer focus and both the frequency and timing of social media activity. Some methods are outlined that businesses may use to increase their visibility on social media.

Keywords: Social media, Events, Facebook, Festival, Tourism

I. INTRODUCTION

The expansion of the internet in the modern day has radically altered society, and with the abundance of digital content readily available, anybody may quickly acquire any piece of knowledge they would want. As a result, the world has become more interconnected than ever before, with individuals all over the globe able to share ideas, news, and goods in novel ways. There have been repercussions for corporate practices as a result of this change, since new possibilities have opened up. This has had an effect on the tourist sector.

Nowadays, especially in the age of social media, people want to have experiences that make them feel something. There are several ways in which social media contributes to the tourist industry, such as through information gathering, decision making, and brand promotion. Since social media is a collaborative marketing tool that allows businesses to communicate with their customers and get insight from their views and opinions, it is essential that the tourism industry learn and implement the best practices for dealing with consumers in this medium. Social capital and a sense of belonging are two outcomes of active engagement in social media. Users of social media have a greater sense of agency in their travel experiences, since they are actively involved in the marketing, design, production, and consumption of those experiences. Therefore, in this research, we interpret the function of social media within the tourist sector as a promotional strategy for events.

The term "social media" has morphed and expanded in meaning as its use has altered and developed throughout time. As a result, defining "social media" is a contentious issue. Definitions and salient features of the nature of social media are discussed. Some of these features include: 1) supporting multiple content types (such as text, video, images, audio, PDF, and PowerPoint); 2) enabling cross-platform interaction via social sharing, messaging, email, and feeds; 3) facilitating one-on-one, small-group, and large-group discussions; and 4) extending engagement by producing in-the-moment online events, taking online interactions offline, or augmenting live events online.

The Internet continues to expand, along with the wealth of resources it provides. In addition, more and more people have access to social networking sites. Because of the content that can be found online, individuals all over the world have easier and faster access to information and communication with one another. The Internet has revolutionized human interaction and commerce. Also affected is the tourism sector, as consumers now turn first to the internet when researching potential vacation spots,

and both service providers and customers now have more ways than ever to get in touch with businesses. Crucially, unlike in the preceding twenty years, modern customers may now take the initiative in starting these dialogues.

For the most part, anything that is marketed and done so over the Internet is considered Internet marketing. Besides traditional forms of online advertising like banners and text links, Internet marketing also include email and social media campaigns. Advertisements in the most crucial and lucrative portion of the marketing mix—traditional advertising—appeared in print or broadcast media including newspapers, television, radio, magazines, and billboards. The overarching goal of every advertising campaign is to reach as many people as possible with a uniform message, while giving the advertiser complete discretion over the medium, timing, and substance of the campaign's dissemination..

II. INTERNET AND SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING

Traditional marketing methods have had to be rethought in light of the Internet's ever-increasing popularity, which has altered the ways in which people learn about and process information, interact with one another, and make purchases. A growing number of online resources—including blogs, wikis, social networks, and news websites—are making accessing information a more communal activity. Blogs, tweets, and Facebook profiles are updated with the newest news, gadgets, and gossip within a matter of minutes.

Marketers now have a new platform to disseminate their messages via a "integrated communication strategy" that allows them to broaden their brand's exposure and customer base. As more people start utilising computers, businesses now have a new way to talk to their target audience, and as a result, people's media consumption habits are changing from relying only on offline channels to embracing a more holistic, mixed-media strategy. Online marketing continues to expand, and with it, the methods and tools used to communicate with consumers, which have traditionally been impersonal mass messaging, are becoming increasingly personalised and targeted.

Today, the most dynamic and rapidly expanding area of marketing is internet marketing communication. Marketers that want to reach today's sophisticated, discerning, and dispersed consumers must adapt to a constantly shifting landscape by being abreast of the latest innovations and trends. In this age of constant innovation in hardware and software, staying current might feel like an insurmountable task. Organizers of events that care about their continued success and about reaching new audiences are adjusting to the realities of the digital world. The "digital revolution" has permanently altered the media landscape, and legacy outlets are reluctantly accepting the inevitable. It has also advanced at a rate and in a direction that have stunned observers. The web is continually shifting, developing and changing, and the only way to consistently enjoy its benefits is to remain up-to date.

The proliferation of online information, knowledge, entertainment, and social networking is largely responsible for the continued expansion of the Internet. There has been a huge increase in people using the Internet. In 2010, Google was already receiving 1 billion daily searches, 300 million Internet users were reading blogs, and 2 billion videos were viewed daily on YouTube. More than 37.9 percent of the world's population is online, with the number of users growing from 2.5 billion in 2012 to over 2.7 billion in 2013. By 2020, it's expected that more than 5 billion individuals will be connected to the web. As a result, it's not surprising that the Internet has emerged as the dominant channel for contemporary advertising.

The Internet has undergone several transformations since its inception, and that trend will likely continue. Socializing, teamwork, information sharing, and individual amusement are the web's present mainstays. People of all ages are increasingly relying on the Internet for their informational, social, and entertainment needs. According to the data, approximately one-quarter of the global population is active on at least one social network, and six out of seven individuals have access to the Internet. As a result, it is not surprising that most firms now prioritise their online presence. It wasn't until 2010 that internet advertising budgets in the US finally caught up to and surpassed those of print media like newspapers. This coincided with the year when online readership surpassed that of traditional newspapers, demonstrating the profound effect the Internet has on the advertising and marketing sector. If any one trend characterises the internet realm, it is considered social media. Web 2.0 is

predicated on the idea that people can use the internet to build communities of people who share their interests. The immense influence that social media has to shape public opinion and disseminate information makes it invaluable but also fraught with peril.

One of the most popular types of social media is social networking, which is using a centralised website or application to communicate with a group of friends or peers. Depending on the medium, these communications may consist of text, photographs, videos, links, or other media that may be easily distributed. Sharing information and media is made easier by social networks, which users may utilise to simulate their offline social lives. It depends on the platform, but often they are designed for spontaneous, sharing-based chats between friends and acquaintances. There are many variations across social networks, but generally speaking, they all have three fundamental characteristics: interacting with others, sharing content, and encouraging participation.

If you want to be successful at marketing on social networks, you need to focus on these three things:

- **Advertising** –Internet marketing relies heavily on selecting the ideal keywords and audience to advertise to online. When it comes to marketing, people tend to be less receptive to ads and promotional materials in social settings, yet this is exactly what social networking is all about. The social arena is great for sharing, referrals, and distributing advertisements among friends, making it both tougher and more potent to promote.
- **Building a brand presence** -communication in social network marketing that focuses on the "soft sale." With a strong online identity, an event may interact with its target audience as a social actor. As a result, it becomes an integral part of the publicity for the event.
- **Word of mouth** –It's the most dangerous and unpredictable part of social networking, but also the most rewarding. Good internet marketers may take use of the viral nature of social media to spread the word about their products. Individuals are more inclined to try something new based on what people in their social circle have advised – therefore every marketer's purpose with social media is to try to get the proper people to speak about the brand and spread the word. Facebook, the original and largest social networking service, was launched 11 years ago. In spite of the fact that we live in a period where people quickly lose interest in new trends, the social networking fad is here to stay. Moreover, the daily tally of people who log onto social networks is rising.

III. METHODS

At first, we looked up every festival in KOLKATA that we could find online. Festivals were discovered by searching the websites of regional festival organisations and tourism boards. The resulting list of celebrations (N >= 2390) is exhaustive. Then, an online survey invitation was emailed to the festivals' core contacts. To ensure a wide spectrum of events were included, the International Festival and Event Association also emailed the survey link to its members (n=166) one month later. The online poll had a response rate of 17.5%, with a total of 446 festival administrators participating. A variety of questions on the participants' demographics, social media habits, and ability to follow a complex logistical process were posed. SPSS 22 was used to import the data, where it was cleaned, coded, and checked for missing variables. As a first step in our analysis, we calculated certain descriptive statistics.

IV. RESULTS

Senior administrators (43%), marketing experts (15%), producers and event management employees (9%), and other staff/volunteers (12%) all participated in the poll on behalf of their festival. The vast majority (62%) of the festivals in the sample were staged at a single location, and 48% of attendees were from the same geographic region. All, festivals lasted an average of 7.3 days and 25 years. Festivals included a wide range of genres. Music festivals accounted for 28% of the total, with "other" events accounting for 36%. The majority of festivals were either performance-based (33%), spectator-focused (27%), or interactive (22%).

Among those responsible for running a festival's social media accounts, 59% were paid workers and 22% were volunteers. Among festivals that employed someone to handle social media, 56 percent of workers said they did so in addition to their regular duties. Ninety-nine percent of festivals reported utilising social media in some capacity, and their average social media presence dated back six years. The most popular social media were Facebook (83%), Instagram (57%), Twitter (66%), and YouTube (42%). When asked how often they posted, festivals were most likely to say "several times daily" in

the weeks leading up to (51%), and during (74%), the event. After the event, 58% of businesses said they updated their social media at least once a week. The majority of festivals (53%) only update monthly or not at all during the remainder of the year.

Attendees were surveyed about their experiences using social media to increase participation (see Table 1). Product development was centred on the steps taken by the customer. Identifying the impact that social media plays in attracting and retaining festival-goers may be facilitated by learning how festivals employ these platforms in connection to their focus on customers. The scale was used to analyse how concerned a company is with its customer relationships. According to Table 2, most festivals believe they have a strong focus on their patrons' satisfaction.

The more social media platforms were employed, the more customer-focused the company was ($r(302) = .123, p = .032$). The volume of social media activity at specific time periods was similarly correlated with a focus on the client base. More posts the week prior to the festival ($r(302) = -.220, p .000$) and the week after the festival ($r(301) = -.127, p .028$) were linked with a more robust consumer orientation. There was no correlation between the volume of posts made during the festival week ($r(299) = -.054, p = .356$) or the remainder of the year ($r(302) = -.111, p = .053$) and consumer focus. Take note that more posting was designated as a 1 and no posting at all as a 6.

Table 1: Consumer Engagement through Social Media

Please indicate to what extent you agree to disagree with the following statements by selecting the response that best describes your festival.	N	Mdn	IQR
We use social media to engage festival attendees	354	7	1
We use social media to gain the trust of festival attendees	355	6	1
We use social media to add value to the festival attendees' experience	355	7	1
We use social media to develop an emotional bond with festival attendees	355	7	1
We use social media to encourage festival attendees to use word of mouth to promote the festival organization	355	7	1
We use social media to enhance festival attendee loyalty	354	7	1
We use social media to get festival attendees involved in the festival community	351	7	1

Note: Where 1 = strongly disagree and 7 = strongly agree.

Table 2: Customer Relationship Orientation

Please indicate to what extent you agree to disagree with the following statements by selecting the response that best describes your festival.	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
In our organization retaining attendees is considered to be a top priority	358	7	1
Our employees are encouraged to focus on relationships with attendees	315	6	2
Our volunteers are encouraged to focus on relationships with attendees	342	6	2
In our organization relationships with attendees are considered valuable assets	351	7	1
Our senior management emphasizes the importance of attendee relationships	339	6	2

Note: Where 1 = strongly disagree and 7 = strongly agree.

V. CONCLUSION

Internet access is now crucial to daily life. Despite just being around for the past two decades, the Internet as we know it today has had a profound impact on our society. Although most of us were alive before the advent of the Internet, we can hardly recall what life was like before it and certainly wouldn't survive if we suddenly lost access to all the wonderful technologies and opportunities it

provides. It has simplified our lives and made the entire globe as accessible as the tips of our fingers. That it has become the cornerstone of every successful modern marketing campaign is not surprising, given the profound impact it has on our daily lives.

Festivals with a stronger focus on their audience tend to utilise social media more often in the run-up to and shortly following the event, but festivals of all stripes have trouble maintaining a consistent presence on these platforms during the rest of the year. The findings point to a potential staffing problem. The research's prior phases involved holding focus groups and conducting interviews with festival managers, both of which found that social media is typically used without a clear plan and is simply added on to existing activities and duties. This study's findings show that social media management is often performed by a full-time employee in addition to their other duties. Because of the time commitment required for social media marketing, this might be challenging. It is advised that festivals hire people with experience in social media interaction because of the importance of this area. With the right plan in place, your team should be able to handle social media in addition to their regular duties, and automation tools may assist lighten the load.

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