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Impacts of WeChat on Millennials' Perceptions and Consumption Behaviors in the Hotel Industry

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Impacts of WeChat on Millennials' perceptions and consumption behaviors

in the hotel industry

by

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Part One

Introduction

Social media, known as interactive Web 2.0 Internet-based applications, has deeply changed and reformed interpersonal communication and business operation with the wide spread of Internet and the development of technology. In the past few years, since mobile apps are becoming more and more popular, the access of social media is not limited to tablet computers only, but is also available for almost all kinds of smart phone devices, such as iPhone, Android, Symbian and so on. The function of social media is not confined to real-time message transmission or information sharing any more. It has expanded to a widely range of features, such as online purchase and payment, e-commerce business, and service for different types of social events.

Social media plays an increasingly important role in daily personal life as well as in business activities. People are not merely considered as social media users, but also the component of social media itself. As a result, it is very crucial for people to realize the importance and impacts of social media, especially for those business operators.

WeChat (Weixin in Chinses, literally "micro message") is a cross-platform instant text and voice messaging communication service for multiple mobile devices, developed by Tecent in China, first released in the January of 2011. It is claimed to provide "the new way to connect" and create "a way of life". It is free to download, install and register, and support all kinds of smart phone platforms with multiple language versions, such as Chinese, English, Japanese, French, and Spanish. WeChat provides its users different ways to communicate and interact with friends innovatively through instant text messaging, hold-to-talk voice

messaging, group messaging, lively video sharing, location sharing, money transferring, and contact information sharing.

Among all the WeChat users, Millennials is the majority. With the growing-up of Millennials, they are becoming more and more powerful and important to the society and will be the next target segmentation for most of the industries in the very near future. Especially for the hotel industry, the industry that urges to attract Millennials patrons for further substantial development, how to attract Millennials is becoming a critical issue for those hotel operators.

Purpose

This paper aims at examining how WeChat, a highly popular Chinese social media phenomenon, impacts Millennials' perception of hotel brands and their consumption behaviors with hotel experiences more generally. The purpose is to develop a marketing guide that will help Las Vegas megaresorts operators use WeChat to attract Chinese Millennial guests.

Statement of objective

The objectives of this paper include:

1) To analyze from earlier researches and studies, draw conclusion and hypotheses of the impacts of WeChat on Millennials' perception and consuming behavior.

2) To make comparison between WeChat and other social media with multiple criteria: demographic statistics of users, different features and functions of the social media, use and application for marketing. Then find out the uniqueness and advantages of WeChat

that should be applied in the hotel industry.

3)   To interview experts from the industry, who have knowledge and experience of using WeChat in marketing. Analyze how the realistic practices apply to the conclusion and hypotheses that come from the previous researchers and studies.

4)   To do a case study and sum up how WeChat impacts on Millennials in the hotel industry and come to a conclusion or summary.

5)   To analyze all the work above and come up with a guide that will help hotel operators in Las Vegas use WeChat to attract Chinese Millennial guests.

Justification

Previous studies are about the general research on social media's marketing function in all industries. Studies of WeChat are mainly in China, target at Chinese users' using habits and psychology, but don't have any guidance to hotel industry. Thus, there is a research gap in current studies on the topic of how WeChat impacts Millennials' perception and consuming behavior in hotel industry. This paper will have a narrow scope focused on hotel industry only rather than a wide range of industries. And the research will be a supplement to fill that gap.

Constraints

Use of WeChat is not the only reason that will impact Millennials' perception and consuming behavior. It is very difficult to determine the cause-and-effect relationship between the use of WeChat and the outcomes. Besides, different types of hotels may have different customer segmentation and marketing strategies. Hotels may cater to customers in a completely

different way regarding to their features. As a result, the guide will not applicable to all types

of hotels.

Part Two

Introduction

Social media networks, known as interactive Web 2.0 Internet-based applications, have deeply changed and reformed interpersonal communication and business operation with the wide spread of Internet and growing population of users. Along with the development of smart phones and mobile electronic equipment, the access of social media is not limited to tablet computers only, but is also available for many different types of electronic devices.

A significant element of social media networks is recognized as user-generated content (UGC). Word-of-mouth (WOM) communication or consumer-to-consumer (C2C) conversations, are used to be the most influential channel of communication in the market place, which impacts consumers' perception and attitudes to the products and brands significantly. Consumers consider other people's personal experience and comments are more reliable and trustworthy than the marketing messages themselves (Shamhuyenhanzva, van Tonder, Roberts-Lombard & Hemsworth, 2016). Nevertheless, in most circumstances, the influence of traditional WOM is very limited and can only affect certain range of people, such as family members, friends, and colleagues, etc. with the constraints of time and location.　However, the emergence of social media, such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Snapchat, has greatly enable consumers to share their information and experiences in a public platform in groups of friends, or even strangers through what is now identified as electronic WOM (eWOM). Different from traditional WOM, eWOM shifted the focus to online communities with group characteristics instead of individual characteristic where message content matters most (Shamhuyenhanzva et al., 2016). eWOM also enables

consumers to communicate in a various online settings and approaches, which extend the influence of its consumers range.

Considering the eWOM is occurring through increasingly different array of various electronic channels, more and more business operators and scholars are interested in evaluating its' impacts to the industry. With the arising awareness of the effects of eWOM, promoting and managing the eWOM strategically, and optimizing the value of eWOM proactively seem to be crucial to many companies.

The Power of eWOM

The value of eWOM

The "saying is believing effect" theory shows that people adapt and transmit their message in order to suit their audience. Especially in providing the biased message, people's memory and judgment are influenced by those biased message and people come to believe the biased message that they provided. Kim, Naylor, Sivadas, and Sugumaran (2016) utilized the "saying is believing" effect as the theoretical framework and did an experimental study with a total of 166 undergraduate students.

Kim et al. (2016) found that incentivized eWOM changes communicators' attitude and the number of opportunities to engage in providing eWOM also affects the degree of change in attitude as well. This means that the more opportunities people have to provide eWOM, the more possible for them to enhance their attitude. Moreover, they found that the initial communication is significantly important since the initial biased message affects people's subsequent attitude and lead to an extreme bias.

However, comparing positive eWOM and negative eWOM, there is a difference on the degree of their influences on people's attitude. Kim et al. (2016) suggested that the negative eWOM has a greater influence on people than positive eWOM and people attach more weight and attention to the negative ones. As a result, when people have multiple times to provide their message, they negative message notably become more negative while the positive message slightly become positive. And from the analysis of people's sentiment, Kim et al. (2016) concluded that when people repeatedly provide negative message, more extreme negative thoughts come up than positive thoughts.

Kim et al. (2016) research implies that incentivized eWOM has significant impacts on people's attitude and sentiment. Since people's subsequent attitude is almost based on the initial eWOM and negative message has greater effect and power than positive message, it's very crucial to operate good management of eWOM at the very beginning.

Even though Kim et al. (2016) did a great experimental study on Millennials, there are still limitations to their research. First, they use "saying is believing" effect to be their theoretical framework. This is plausible explanation but not applicable to all circumstances since they manipulated the experiment. So when there are no external incentives or the message is counter-attitudinal, this framework is not suitable. Also, they conducted the experiment among 166 undergraduate students, which means the sample has a very limited age range, similar education level and living environment and cannot be generalized to a wider population. In addition, in their experiment, they only manipulated the extra class credit as payment incentive, which is not reliable enough and not applicable to other kinds of

incentives.

The credibility of eWOM

Knowing that eWOM has a great value and impacts to people's attitude and sentiment is not enough for business operators and scholars. How people perceive others' message, how credible the eWOM is, and what elements impact the effectiveness and credibility of eWOM are questions that left to be solved.

O'Reilly, MacMillan, Mumuni and Lancendorfer (2016) did a research to examine the role of source credibility and message relevance in order to get a better understanding of eWOM impacts. They found out that source expertise, source trustworthiness, persona similarity, and the usage similarity are four important elements that determine eWOM impacts.

According to O'Reilly et al. (2016), for eWOM to be considered credible, the source of message has to be credible at first. This suggests that the person who makes the comments or creates the message must have the expertise, which means the person are required to have the knowledge of that product/service. Usually, well-written lengthy comments using industry jargon contribute to the reviewer's expertise and credentials. Contents that mention both pros and cons seem to be more credible than the ones that only highlight negative or positive sides. Source trustworthiness is another key factor that determines the credibility of source. This highlights the motivation for posting the message. People evaluate the motives behind the message and determine whether there is a manipulation in the certain action. Source with oblivious evidence of promotion to ask people to buy, click link, or forward the post are

deemed to be less credible. As a result, once the source both has the expertise and is trustworthy, it is deemed to be credible.

However, source credibility is not powerful enough to impact people decision-making process. Expertise and trustworthiness is only the basic threshold to eWOM credibility. Beside these, people have to examine the message relevance as well.

There are two indicators underlie the message relevance: persona similarity and usage similarity. The former one suggests that people tend to like others with similar character and background. And people are more easily to perceive message that created by similar others and believe the message is more relevant to them (O'Reilly et al., 2016). For example, a person considers the message is relevant to him when he thinks the creator sounds like him, has the similar writing style, or even has the same age.

The later indicator suggests that people's assessment of how alike the usage of the product/service will influence the message relevance to them (O'Reilly et al., 2016).   For example, a person perceive the message is relevant to him when he notices the creator uses the product/service in the same manner with him, or they have the same expectations to the product/service.

In sum, persona similarity and usage similarity imply the degree of similarity between people who create message and their receivers, and influence people's assessment of message relevance. The more similar they are, the more the message is relevant to them, and the more the message is deemed to be credible. And according to O'Reilly et al. (2016) research, message relevance has a strong influence on people and impacts their ultimate purchase

decision-making process significantly.

Moran and Muzellec (2017) put forward the 4Cs of credibility on SNS platform, which shares some similar opinions with O'Reilly et al. (2016). They explained that the relationship between people (community) and their respective experience levels (competence) determine the credibility of source. They highlighted the importance of source expertise, which contribute to the source credibility. They also mentioned that the substance of communication (content) and how people resonate to the message (consensus) consist the message credibility, which also supports the significance of persona similarity and usage similarity to the message relevance.

Generation Y's perception of eWOM credibility

Specially focusing on the Generation Y, Shamhuyenhanzva et al. (2016) did a cross-sectional study in South Africa in the fast-food sector to examine the factors that influence the trustworthiness and credibility of eWOM. Their study indicates that homophily, authority, and interestingness have a significant positive impact that mediates to the source trustworthiness, and then contribute to the credibility of eWOM independently. The first two variables are similar to the researches that mentioned above. Homophily reveals the similarity between people, the wiliness and tendency for individuals to associate themselves with people share same characteristics, mutual interests and concerns (Shamhuyenhanzva et al., 2016). As discussed before, homophily, similar to the persona similarity and usage similarity, enables the message to be more relevant to people and enhances the message to be more persuasive and credible.

Authority is the degree to which people will perceive the credibility of eWOM, which

relates to source expertise closely (Shamhuyenhanzva et al., 2016). Through rating and

reviews, people can easily know other's actual usage and first-hand consumption experience.

And the people will evaluate the credibility of message and determine whether they want to

believe it or not.

These two variables are pretty generalized to people in a wide range. However,

Generation Y are more special to any other generations since they are grown up with the

development of information technology and affected by the Internet world deeply.

Shamhuyenhanzva et al. (2016) put forward that considering the characteristics of Generation

Y, interestingness is primary importance and influence their perception of eWOM

significantly. Since people are bombarded and overloaded with eWOM clutter, UGC that is

surprising, interesting and followed by more likes, are more attractive and credible to

Generation Y.

Even though Shamhuyenhanzva et al. (2016) did a good quantitative research on the

topic, there are limitations as well. First of all, they sampled in South Africa in Gauteng

province, which may lead to a bias in culture and population differences. Secondly, the

companies they chose are also limited to certain brands that cannot be popularized to the

general. For example, the Ocean Basket is a South Africa based seafood restaurant, which is

not known by people from other regions or countries. Moreover, although interestingness is a

very important variable to the credibility of eWOM, they didn't give out a well-organized

definition of interestingness. They didn't explained clearly that interestingness refers to the

content itself or the way the words organized, or any other elements that make people think the message is interesting.

eWOM and Marketing

eWOM's impacts from consumers' perspectives

With easy access of social networking sites (SNS) via laptops, desktops, smartphones, and smartwathces, eWOM plays an increasingly important role in marketing and advertising. Alhidari, Iyer and Paswan (2015) did a research to study the how SNS involvement, self-reliance, and risk-taking influence potential consumers' purchasing intention. The result shows that eWOM is a powerful tool to enhance purchasing behavior, but the contributes varied.

Engagement of eWOM and SNS are associated with purchasing intention and the level of involvement impacts the degree of purchasing intention (Alhidari et al., 2015). People who are highly involved in the SNS have more opportunities and higher possibilities to be exposed to the eWOM. And consequently, they are more likely to be persuaded by those comments and message online, and their purchasing intention is enhanced by so. As a result, eWOM can positively increase purchasing intention with the efforts of people's involvement on the SNS and their interaction with others.

Surprisingly, there is no significantly relationship between self-reliance, risk-taking and purchasing intention. Self-reliance refers to one's confidence in one's own powers, abilities and resources. This type of people is more likely to search information for products/service on the SNS by their own rather than rely on others. However, there is no evidence show that

they are more active in engaging in eWOM on SNS, which indicates that people with self-reliance may search online but not involve in the online communication.

Risk-taking refers to one's ability of acceptance to possible negative consequences after their decision-making. Risk-takers are more likely to try new products, accept novel ideals, and more open-minded than others. Alhidari et al. (2015) found that risk-takers is positively associated with eWOM on the SNS, which means they have more tendency to leave comments, share experience and communicate with other users. Meanwhile, there is no evidence support that risk-taking relates to purchasing intention. These findings indicate scholars and business operator pay more attention to individual involvement rather than self-reliance and risk-taking in order to improve consumer's purchasing intention.

Besides these, Alhidari et al. (2015) also found that compare different source of eWOM, people generally consider personal eWOM to be more reliable and credible than the eWOM that generated by companies. Mishra and Satish (2016) also mentioned the same thing. They highlighted that user generated eWOM is more powerful and influential in comparison the company generated eWOM. They also noticed that with the help of more credible message, there is a higher possibility in enhancing people's purchasing behavior as well.

Leung, Law, Hoof, and Buhalis (2013) did a research in reviewing and analyzing all extant social media-related research articles in tourism and hospitality fields during 2007 to 2011. They mainly analyzed related articles from both the consumers' and the suppliers' perspectives during travelers' travel planning process.

From the consumers' perspective, they found out that in the pre-trip phase of the

travelers' travel planning process, social media plays an important role in providing, extending, exchanging, and sharing information and experience through UGC and eWOM. However, even though UGC and eWOM are quite similar to traditional WOM, consumers often perceive them as less trustworthy than WOM considering it's difficult to identify the source of information and message. Especially for UGC, on the one hand, many of them are anonymous. And on the other hand, it's still not easy to tell the experience is revealed by real people or created by commercial writers.

They also noticed that a number of research studies have confirmed the significant impacts of social media in the during-trip phase of the travelers' travel planning process. For example, eWOM strongly influences consumers' perception of products' and service's quality and their purchasing decisions. Positive consumption experience and stories on social media would encourage consumers to visualize the consumption of a product or service and increase their purchase intention.

Overall, eWOM contributes to customers' loyalty and enhances their purchasing intention and ultimately results the increase the tendency of purchasing behavior. However, different types of eWOM have different kinds of impacts and degree of stimulation to consumers as well.

Mishra and Satish (2016) evaluated and analyzed the influence of different types of eWOM in different stages of decision-making process. During the recognition of needs and information searching stage, eWOM such as advertisements works as an external stimulus that provides product/service information and introduction to people.   While during the

evaluation and purchase decision-making stage, people are more likely to pay attention on eWOM such as online reviews, discussions, ratings and recommendations. And during the post-purchase behavior stage, feedback seems more important to people when they look for eWOM on SNS. Mishra and Satish (2016) also stated that there is a distinction between the quantity and quality of eWOM. Thus, content is more important than volume.

eWOM's impacts from suppliers' perspectives

From the suppliers' perspective, Leung et al. (2013) study shows that social media is a good tool for marketing by enhancing the online image of business and companies. With the development of social media, there is a tremendous potential in electronic marketing. But at the same time, it still remains the uncertainty about the financial return of social media marketing. They pointed out that there is no sufficient researches or evidence that could tell us how much money and how many resources companies should invest into social media marketing and the investments could turn into business to what degree.

They also implied that social media would be helpful for revenue generation and product distribution by decreasing traditional direct distribution costs with targeted push strategies. There is a significant potential of social media in enhancing consumers' recognition and awareness of brand, customer engagement, and customer loyalty. In addition, social media provides a great platform for business to communicate with their customers and gather patrons' input and feedback. In this way, companies could gain insight of customer preference and consuming behavior, competitive advantages, product defects and service failure, and then make corresponding adjustment or improvement for future better

development and strategy plan.

Marketing of Social Media in Hotel Industry

Researches and studies on the topic of effectiveness of social media advertisements are

popular among scholars and have led to a very important further study of

Attitude-toward-the-ad (Aad). Leung, Bai, and Stahura (2013) found out that cognitions of ad

and brand both have direct impacts on Aad and attitude toward the brand.

They also claimed the importance of social media experience in social media marketing,

which has an indirect influence on intention of booking and eWOM. When customers have a

good social media experience, they are more likely to have positive attitudes to the social

media site as well as to the hotel brand. And in turn, this strengths the cognition of hotel

brand, increases booking intention, and is beneficial for spreading positive eWOM.

Besides, their research implies that different social media sites, such as Facebook and

Twitter, share the same marketing mechanism. The social media site that a hotel choose to

use as their marketing tool doesn't matter most, but the social media experience they create

for customers and the brand building on social media.

Chan and Guillet (2011) did a research on examining marketing performance on 23

social media sites of 67 hotels in Hong Kong. They found out that hotels are performed poor

in using social media for making and learning their customers.

The use and impacts of WeChat

Lien and Cao (2014) did a research on samples that randomly selected from the database

of sojump to examine Chinese WeChat users' attitudes, motives, and trusts to positive WOM.

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Though their research model, they found out that the main motivation for WeChat users to install and adopt this app is to communicate and interact with friends and family members for social purposes. They also pointed out that people's perception of reliability of a certain post and comment of a product or service depends on the trust level of the person who makes the post and comment. In other words, if a product or service is posted or commented by a user's good friends or well-known companies, the user would have more confidence of the post and comment. Moreover, the research shows that Chinese WeChat users are more willing to post and comment positively on products and service to their friends, which means those users are more likely to share and create positive WOM.

Lien and Cao (2014) also noticed that although WeChat provides official accounts for companies, not many of them have actually done that, especially for those big companies. Many of the business operators have the concern that there are no sufficient specialized people with enough experience that can manage the official accounts properly. Besides this, considering that budget control tactic, they believe that the recruitment of professionals and the management of daily operation would increase their total cost.

Gan (2016) did a research to study Chinese WeChat users' "liking" behavior particularly in order to find out the motivation behind this simple action. The research says that the main reason for users to hit the button "like" is to perceive a high level of enjoyment. Users' liking behavior also depends on the value of the information they get. When obtain useful and valuable information that can satisfy their needs, users are more likely to click "like". Moreover, liking behavior is important for social support for lots of users. They "like" the

post to deliver the message that "I do care about you" as well as to maintain good online relationships and social bonds between each other.

The study also reveals a gender difference in WeChat users' liking behavior. The motivation of female users is to obtain social support and information. But male users are tending to click "like" more often when they see things entertaining, interesting or funny which can increase their self-enjoyment.

Mao (2014) did a study to understand the motivation and factors for undergraduate students to use WeChat. The research result shows that the majority of undergraduate students use WeChat under the influences of their friends and classmates in order to keep communication with others and expand their social network. In addition, undergraduate students view WeChat as a tool to release stress and relax themselves as well as a reliable resource of information.

Conclusion to Literature Review

Previous researches and study are mainly focused on the general function of social media, especially the influences of eWOM. Scholars concluded and analyzed the value and power of eWOM, elements that contribute to the credibility of eWOM, and impacts of eWOM and social media in marketing from both consumer perspective and supplier perspective. However, there is a limited research on examining how different forms of eWOM impact people's perception and consuming behavior. Also, studies focused on different generation and different ages of population are not sufficient. Moreover, Studies of WeChat are mainly in China, target at Chinese users, and do research without particular

industry guidance. Thus, there is a gap in current research papers on the topic of how WeChat

impacts Millennials' perception and consuming behavior in hotel industry and need further

research.

Part Three

Introduction

Previous parts have already analyzed the importance of eWOM, elements that impact

the credibility of eWOM, the relationship between eWOM and social media marketing, and

the use and influence of WeChat in earlier research and study. In order to enhance the

significance of WeChat, this part is going to compare WeChat with other types of social

media deeply, highlight the unique features of WeChat, and discuss the advantages of

choosing WeChat as a tool and channel for social media marketing. By interviewing experts

from the industry, this part will present critical examples from realistic experience. After

analyzing and concluding industrial experience and previous research, a marketing guide will

be developed, which will put forward relative suggestions, practice, and help Las Vegas

megaresorts operators use WeChat to attract Chinese Millennial guests.

Results

Comparison between WeChat and other types of social media

WeChat is claimed to provide "the new way to connect" and create "a way of life". It is

quite similar with other kinds of social media that WeChat is free to download, install and

register, and support all kinds of smart phone platforms with multiple language version, such

as Chinese, English, Japanese, French, Spanish and so on. However, WeChat is more

multi-functional and user-friendly with great convenience and innovation.

WeChat provides its users different ways to communicate and interact with friends

innovatively through instant text messaging, hold-to-talk voice messaging, group messaging,

lively video sharing, location sharing, money transferring, and contact information sharing.

The most significant function of WeChat is the one called "moments"; which allows users to post and share almost everything they would like to, such as pictures, videos, articles, music and web-links. Users can make comments, "like" each other's posts, and share information easily. They can also select different levels of privacy to determine who can have access to their posts and shares. Moreover, users can hide, store or delete their posts whenever they want. And more important, WeChat support online payment and purchasing, which means WeChat is not limited to social media plat form only, but is also a tool of electronic payment.

Although WeChat shares some similar functions with Facebook, such as information share and post, friends circle social network, and online chat. But for instant messaging voice messaging on mobile device, users have to download Facebook and Messenger—two separate apps, which brings more inconvenience to their users. Comparing with Snapchat, WeChat users can leave their post on their account as long as they want while Snapchat can only share information for 24 hours. In addition, Snapchat users can only write their own comments and experience by adding words on the picture or the video, which apparently doesn't leave enough room for long paragraphed shares. Even though Instagram is a good platform to share pictures and videos for visual display, it is very limited to the image-based information sharing. Instagram users are unable to share links or articles directly through their account. And for most of other types of social media, the online payment function is not available, which in other words, means that direct business cannot be finished on those platforms instantly. Considering these, WeChat has some advantages in its various functions.

WeChat is the top social media app in China currently. Chinese adult users spend more

than 40 minutes on WeChat daily and more than half of them open it with a very high

frequency of over 10 times a day (Smith, 2016a). Among all the WeChat users, almost 45%

of them age from 18 to 25 and 40% of them age from 26 to 35, which means more than 80%

of WeChat users are Millennials (Statista, 2015). Besides, there is a very important fact that

Chinese social media is highly government-directed and censored. Many international

competitors such as Facebook, WhatsApp, and Twitter have been blocked to use for such a

long period of time (Yang, Sun, & Lee, 2016). And this creates a big market share for

WeChat in China to dominate the social media industry.

Although most of the WeChat users are Chinese, there are still 70 million foreign users

and the number is growing rapidly in the recent years (Statista, 2015). Comparing with

mainstream social media applications, for example, according to the latest data collected in

2016 (Smith, 2016b), Facebook messenger and WhatsApp has 1 billion users separately,

Instagram has 500 million users, and Line has 218 million users, WeChat is significantly

competitive with 818 million users. The number of registered accounts of WeChat has

already reached 1.1 billion with an average 570 million active users daily in 2015. These

statics also reveals that WeChat has a huge potential with a large number of users. And there

is a trend for WeChat to become more and more popular in a worldwide range as well.

As a result, WeChat is more functional diverse with easy-use interface and better user

experience. WeChat is also more practical and efficient for marketing advertisement and

information delivery. Along with a significant number of users, dominance among Chinese

Millennials, and big market potential, WeChat has a great prospect for social media

marketing.

The Value and Credibility of eWOM

Nowadays, customers are intended to gather information from others' comments, experience, and stories online. eWOM plays a vital role in influencing customers' attitude and sentiment—customers' perception to a certain product or brand. Especially for those negative eWOM, people usually pay more attention rather than positive eWOM (Kim, Naylor, Sivadas, and Sugumaran, 2016). This means that for hotel industry operators, it's very critical to realize the importance of eWOM, understand the power of eWOM in marketing, and manage their customers' eWOM on social media in a scientific and strategic way. And more efforts should be put into dealing with those negative ones since they have further and deeper impacts on customers' attitude and sentiment.

Even though eWOM has impacts on influencing peoples' perception and decision-making process, it impacts people to different degree corresponding to its different level of credibility. The more credible people think eWOM is, the deeper and further they will be influenced. There are several factors that will affect credibility of eWOM, but mainly are the source of message and relevance of message.

The source of message mainly relies on the users' respective experience of level. Customers are more likely to believe experts—who have more knowledge and information about the product/service with more competence than others (Moran and Muzellec, 2017). The posting motivation also affects the credibility. Long content with well writing and detailed stories usually worth trustworthiness rather than short poor writing. Real users'

eWOM always has better credibility than fake users' or robot users'. Meanwhile, the

relevance of message also matters significantly. Customers normally prefer to trust other

people who share similar persona or usage habit (O'Reilly, MacMillan, Mumuni &

Lancendorfer, 2016). Especially for customers who find that they have similar purchasing

purpose and way of use with the user who made the post or comment, they would believe that

message is somehow more relevant to them and more reliable.

Experience of Using WeChat from the Experts

An assistant hotel operation manager from an Asia-based international hotel group

accepted a short interview and shared her working experience by using WeChat for hotel

marketing. She mentioned that it is very popular to use WeChat as their social

media-marketing tool in China hotel industry. For the hotel she works for, it has a public

account on WeChat that managed and operated by marketing team members. On that account,

marketing team members will post articles, pictures, and videos to provide hotel information,

recent promotion and activities, improvement and success they have made, and other

customers' feedback experience. The content of post includes many different aspects, such as

guest rooms, food and beverage, and charity events. She highlighted that WeChat helps them

to improve customers' perception of hotel brand and increase customers consuming behavior

significantly. Many customers come to hotels with the coupon code or the discount QR code

from WeChat, which increases their sales and revenue greatly. She said they also have

program to encourage customers to share hotel's post to their own WeChat "moment". Hotel

will reward with certain discount for next purchase of small gifts after customers share the

post. She said herself will share those posts to her own WeChat as well. And her friends will come to ask her for more details about that post since she is the expert in the industry and her friends trust what she posts online (S. Wu, personal communication, April, 2017).

An event team leader from a mega resort company in Las Vegas, which sets Chinese guests as their important customer segmentation, also took an interview and talked about his working experience. He particularly mentioned that is when they hold traditional Chinese New Year activities on the Linq Promenade to ask people scan WeChat QR code and add their hotel public account as friend, there are very few people like to participate. He said this is because WeChat is only popular among Chinese customers and their posts are almost all in Chinese, which means other nationality customers can't read their posts at all. He also highlighted that he thinks the content they post on WeChat are kind of boring to most of Chinese. There is nothing interesting or attractive enough for people to engage (J. Wang, personal communication, February, 2017).

Conclusions

As discussed before, eWOM is more and more important in today's marketing. Among all kinds of platforms, WeChat has a great potential and unique features and advantages in social media marketing. Hotel industry is not an industry that considered as traditional accommodation provider, but also evolved to be the creator of entertainment. In other words, hotel operators have a much wider scope of their business, which is not limited to sale hotel rooms, but also has been expanded to the sale and operate of restaurants, shows, retails, conventions, clubs, and other more. And the competition between hotels is fiercer than before.

In this situation, there are more content and requirements for hotel operators to exercise their marketing in a more efficient and strategic way.

The Millennials is the young generation that grows up with the Internet tightly together. They have been get used to the cluster of social media marketing and been sophisticated to use different types of social media Apps. Among different kinds of social media platforms, WeChat has the advantages in easy and convenient using experience, more functional and innovative features, sound foundation of users, and huge market potential. As a result, it is very important for business operators to realize the significance of WeChat marketing and take first leading step to dominant the market.

eWOM is an important indicator in social media marketing, which influences customers attitude and sentiment to products and services significantly. Improving credibility of eWOM and increasing its positive impacts on peoples' perception and purchasing behavior is the vital mission for social media marketing. Combing the usage of WeChat for better eWOM, suggestions and guidance are offered for hotel operators as following marketing guide:

- Set up a Hotel Public Account

- Manage the Account with Professional Marketing Team

- Post Attractive and Selective Contents

- Post Attractive and Selective Contents

- Incentive Program and Reward Activities

- Follow-up and Update Timely

Set up a Hotel Public Account

Using WeChat as social media marketing platform by creating hotel public account first. With a public account, operators have the opportunities and channels to post the latest promotions and events in hotel, share hotel information, and contribute to build a better brand image. Moreover, a public account will be more reliable with accurate information compare with personal account. However, when set up the account, there are some things need to be take care of as well. First, select the customer segmentation that this account focuses at—Asian market or North American maker, general customers or VIP customers, Millennials or Baby boomers—target at different customers with distinguished accounts might be a good choice for better marketing.

Manage the Account with Professional Marketing Team

Professional marketing team is the key of successful social media marketing. Experts with latest technology, marketing skills, sophisticated strategy, and specialized knowledge are very necessary since they know how to post properly with good manner. Poor management will result in very severe consequences. For example, simple and plain design of pictures, dull and tiresome editing of video, boring and bad-organized article will reduce people's attention and damage brand image as well. Also, unprofessional responding to people's comments may cause serious public relation issues. Without a good management, the establishment of hotel public account is meaningless and may even be harmful to the development of hotels. Considering this, hiring qualified marketing team with professional knowledge and skills is the most important thing that hotel operators should take into consideration.

Post Attractive and Selective Contents

The quality of content is another important indicator for effective social media marketing. All the material that be posted online should be selected carefully. The content must be attractive and appealing to get people's attention and make people feel the content is relevant to them. Considering the elements that contribute to the credibility of eWOM, hotel operators should post content in a more genuine way rather than typical commercial language. Also, share customers' positive feedback and experience to lead people believe that these stories are relevant to them as well. Besides, high-quality pictures, well-designed videos, and exquisite-written articles are a big plus to efficient social media marketing.

Incentive Program and Reward Activities

Incentive program and reward activities are useful to encourage people engage in sharing posts to their friends. Because customers are intended to trust people who have similar persona and using habit with them, encouraging people to share posts is a useful way to attract their friends and relatives. Also, it is a method to spread the information and broadcast the impacts of original post to a wider and broader range, and reach more people as much as possible. E-giftcards, coupon, discount, cash-back, lottery drawing and other small gift could be used as incentives. Earning extra membership points, free enrollment with free points, and additional membership benefits could be the items for reward activities. This will help to increase peoples' willingness to participate and encourage others to join them.

Follow-up and Update Timely

Since people are more sensitive to negative eWOM rather than positive eWOM, it's

very important for marketing team members to monitor their online feedback and comments in real time. Once receive a negative comment, quick and proper respond should be made as soon as possible to minimize the side effects. With those good comments, it still needs to be highlighted out in order to let other users recognize out at the very beginning to create a positive impression. In addition, timing is a very tricky factor in social media marketing. Marketing team should have the knowledge of perfect time to post to make the most use of it. For example, at what time during a day people use WeChat more often should be examined and analyzed, and then information should be posted at point of time to make sure it will reach more people and get more attention. At the same time, the frequency of updates is another aspect that needs to think about. Posting too often will make customers feel like drown in the overload information and lose their patience and attention. But posting too seldom will let people ignore the post or don't care anymore. So it requires strategy and scientific research to study users using habit and do the marketing more efficiently.

Overall, hotel operators should realize and acknowledge the importance and impacts of WeChat in influencing peoples' perception and consuming behavior. Reasonable actions and practice should be taken correspondingly. Once hotel operators can manage WeChat marketing efficiently, they can gain more revenue, better brand image, and more loyal customers.

Recommendations

This paper is based on previous study and research mainly, which didn't take any industrial experiment or collect any realistic data. This makes this paper maybe only work in

a theoretical way without truly practice. The research on WeChat is basically on Chinese

users, which may not very applicable to other foreigner user since people have different

culture and background. Also, this research focuses on giving suggestion to mega resorts in

Las Vegas, which target at Chinese Millennials segmentation. As a result, this paper probably

not suitable for local small casinos with limited marketing budget or totally different market

segmentation. Further research on North American Millennials attitude and usage of WeChat;

how WeChat impacts Las Vegas revenue and income; the possibility and efficiency of using

WeChat to improve Las Vegas hotels B2C business are strongly suggested.

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