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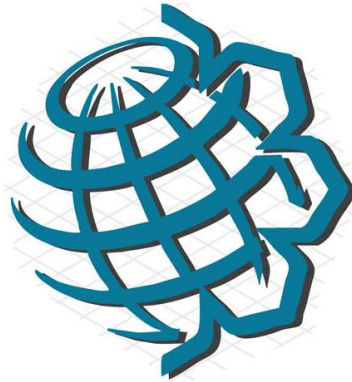
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SUSTAINING GLOBAL DEVELOPMENT GOALS
THROUGH
LANGUAGES, EDUCATION, AND TOURISM

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(TOURISM)**

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THE USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA FOR TRIP PLANNING PROCESS: A STUDY ON DOMESTIC TOURISTS TO PAHANG

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ABSTRACT

In recent years, the use and reliance of social media by tourists have increased. Social media becomes the alternative to traditional media in the process of trip planning and travel decisions. This study aims to identify the influences of social media towards the trip planning process, which are pre, during, and post-trip among domestic tourists who visited the state of Pahang, Malaysia. This quantitative study identified the influences of social media on two areas, namely the trip planning process and the perceived level of trust. The data were collected using self-administered online questionnaires from domestic tourists who had visited the state within the past 12 months. The findings of this study indicate that the respondents use social media predominantly before the trip. The findings also show that travel information obtained through social media is perceived as trustworthy and reliable by the respondents. Future researchers may include larger samples from other demographic segments as well as the inclusion of other tourist classification.

Keywords: Trip Planning Process; Social Media; Travel Decision

1. INTRODUCTION

The advancement of technology and the rise of popularity of social media spark the interest of the Malaysian population to consider social media as one of the medium to spot places of interest and to make their travel destination choices. This lead to the initiatives by the Malaysia government to incorporate social media as one of the marketing tools to promote local tourism (Tourism Malaysia, 2015). Social media is also crucial within the tourism industry as tourists rely on the trip information as it is easily accessed from the internet. With the information gained from social media and the internet, travel uncertainties can be minimized.

According to the report by the Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission (2017), 85.7% of Malaysians use the internet for social media, online banking and online purchasing. A report in Internet User Survey (2018) mentioned that 73.8% of Malaysian use social media in 2018. Additionally, the improvement in digital technology is flattening traditional differences across generations, which influence more travelers making online bookings.

Previous studies have examined social media and its various functions. Social media can be a useful marketing tool in influencing travelers' behavior in planning a trip. Among other areas, previous research includes the role of social media and tourists' travel planning behaviour (Cox, Burgess, Sellitto & Buultjens, 2009), social media on tourism among students (Rathony, 2013), travel blogs and social media (Chen, Shang & Li, 2014) and social media advertising effect on consumers' responses (Hamouda, 2018).

In recent years, social media, websites and blogs became one of the most important medium in tourism, and this contributes to the increasing research interests (Cheung & Thadani, 2012; Hussain et al., 2017; Yang, 2017). However, there is a limited number of studies that examined the use of social media towards the travel planning process specifically in the context of domestic tourists' perspective. This study aims to identify the use of social media for each trip planning process namely; pre, during and post-trip.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Social Media

The emerging of technology has created social media known as the medium for users to participate and collaborative in order to create, share and exchange information on the internet. As mentioned by Haenlein and Kaplan (2010), the internet is known as the medium to enable users to exchange information. This medium is well known and fast-growing, as social media featured several tools such as search, organize, like, share, and comment content or information in different kinds of environments (Lopez, 2011). Hamid (2015) defined social media as the medium on the internet for consumers to correspondence, participation and create a creative expression by using the different technologies or arranged gadgets.

Consumers own, use and sometimes depend on social media so much; it becomes a part of their life. As stated by Zeng and Gerritsen (2014), the permanent global growth of social media not only influence individuals but also bring impact towards various industries such as tourism and hospitality for promotion, business management and research functions (Leung, Law, Hoof & Buhalis, 2013).

2.1.1 Social Media Classification

There are many types of social media used by consumers to engage with other users. Since the beginning of the development of social media, many researchers attempted to identify and classify the different types of social media (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010, Fotis et al., 2011, Al-Badi, 2014). Previous studies indicate that there is academic disagreement over social media taxonomy or classifications.

The social media are classified based on the set of the related theoretical framework, including media research (social presence and media-richness) and social processes (self-presentation and self-disclosure). The authors argued that these theories were built based on the foundation of social media itself. Thus, the categories of the social media include six types of social media such as blogs and microblogs (Twitter), social networking sites (Facebook), virtual social world (Second Life), collaborative projects (Wikipedia), content communities (Youtube) and virtual game networks (World of Warcraft) as depicted in Table 1 below.

Table 1: *Type of Social Media*

List of social media	Type of social media	Authors (Year)
Facebook, Instagram, Google+	Social networking sites	Kaplan & Haenlein (2010)
TripAdvisor	Reviews	Xiang & Gretzel (2010)
Twitter	Microblogs	Cleffman, Feuerabend, Howald & Kollmann (2010)
YouTube	Media-sharing-communities	Cleffman, Feuerabend, Howald & Kollmann, (2010)
Whatsapp, Telegram	Instant messaging app	Lim, Xu & Pathak (2015)
Booking.com, Trivago, Agoda, Traveloka	Online Travel Agencies	Xiang & Gretzel (2010)

2.2 Trip Planning Process

There are millions of tourists who travel outside their usual environment every year. Concerning this, there has been a significant increase in research on how these tourists plan their trips to different places. Fotis, Buhalis, and Rossides (2012) acknowledged that the role of social media for the trip planning process helps potential tourists to identify their destination choice, as well as desired accommodation and activities they would like to engage in. The number of tourists who rely on social media to plan their trip or search for ideas has increased considerably.

2.2.1 Pre-Trip

The “pre-trip” phase occurs before a tourist travels. According to McCann (2008), this stage consists of the demands of the travelers itself. Would-be tourists gather information and evaluation from social media before they make a travel decision.

2.2.2 During Trip

The “during” phase describes tourists who are currently experiencing their trip for various purposes and experiences (McCann, 2008). Tourists who use social media at this stage are likely to find out information on specific attractions or leisure activities.

2.2.3 Post Trip

The “post” trip is the final stage of the trip planning process. This phase describes the travel activities which tourists have accomplished. McCann (2008) stated that this phase describes tourists when they are back from their trip. Their experiences are evaluated, and tourists can conclude their satisfaction level about the products and/or services that they used during the trip.

2.3 Perceived Level of Trust

Perceived includes a variety of scopes such as social value, emotional value and information value (Zhang et al., 2017). In this context, the information value is essential to understand the use of social media among domestic tourists as information value refers to the benefit and information that the consumers gain from friends and relatives, professional information providers or social media. That information can be applied in order to solve the problem and to enhance one's skill and ability (Zhang et al., 2017).

Trust is one of the most significant essential elements in consumer decision-making especially when this involves the internet (Hanse, Saridakis & Benson, 2018). According to Corritore, Kracher, and Wiedenbeck (2003), trust can be defined as ‘an attitude of confident expectation in an online situation of risk that one's vulnerabilities will not be exploited’. The recent study by Zhang (2017), found that the perceived level of trust has a significant and positive effect on travelers' intention to use new technology to purchase travel-related products and services. Consequently, the present study considers the perceived level of trust among domestic tourists towards travel-related information acquired from social media.

3. METHODOLOGY

The research was undertaken using a quantitative approach. The study focuses on domestic tourists as the sample of this research in order to identify the influence of social media on the trip planning process among the domestic tourists in Malaysia. The condition of this study is that the respondents must have visited or traveled to the state of Pahang in Malaysia for tourism purposes for the last 12 months. Pahang was selected as the state is well-known for its tourist attractions such as Taman Negara, Cameron Highlands, and Genting Highlands to name a few. Domestic tourists are defined as tourists who visit within the country of reference (UNWTO, 2014).

This study's instrument is a set of questionnaires distributed through social media using the Google Form survey. An online survey approach is selected due to the low-cost factor and convenience. Online surveys also have a better magnitude of reach.

The survey was made to be bilingual using English and Malay language. Before the distribution of the survey questionnaires to the respondents, the items were translated from English to Malay Language and then back-translated to English. The questions and items were reviewed, revised and corrected to ensure proper language and grammar use.

The number of domestic tourists' arrival to Pahang is 7,604,372 for 2018 (Tourism Pahang, 2018). Based on Hair et al. (1995), the sample size should be ten times the number of items in the questionnaire. There were 20 items included in this study; therefore, at least 200 samples are needed for this study.

The study employed convenience sampling technique with snowballing approach, where the link to the online survey questionnaire was disseminated to colleagues, families and acquaintances via social media namely Whatsapp, Facebook and Instagram. Respondents were then requested to pass on the link further to their friends or colleagues via similar platform.

In the description of the questionnaire, it is mentioned that the survey was anonymous and would be used for the research purpose only. The amount of time required to complete the survey was approximately three to five minutes. In two weeks from 7th March 2019 to 21st March 2019, the researchers approached 250 respondents; however, only 220 respondents were valid for this research and used for the data analysis. The removal of the other 30 respondents was based on the screening question which required the respondents to have visited the state of Pahang within the last 12 months.

The questionnaire was divided into four sections. The first section covered the demographic details, including gender, age, income level, education, types of social media use and frequency. Following Fotis, Buhalis and Rossides (2012), all twelve items under the Trip Planning Process were measured using the 5-point Likert-type scale: Strongly Disagree (1), Disagree (2), Neutral (3), Agree (4) and Strongly Agree (5). Two items measuring

Social Media influence were measured using a 4-point Likert-type scale; Not at all (1), Unlikely (2), Likely (3) and Definitely (4) following Lo, Cheung and Law (2002). The perceived level of trust was measured through six items adopted from Lo, Cheung and Law (2002) using a 7-point Likert-type scale where tend to disagree (3) and tend to agree (5) were included.

4. MAIN RESULTS

4.1 Profile of Sample

The sample had the following characteristics; as per gender, 75.5% were females and 24.5 males. The over-representation of females had been observed in other studies (Ox et al., 2009), and may to an extent be related to gender differences in trip-related roles (Decrop, 2006). As per age, the highest percentage of respondents fell between the age group of 22 to 25 years old and 18 to 21 years old, which constituted 47.3% and 36.4% of total respondents, respectively. The age group of 36 to 40 and 56 to 60 years old carried the lowest and same percentage at 0.5%. For the age of 26 to 30 years old and 31 to 35, it constitutes 7.7% and 4.1% of the total respondents. The remaining age groups of 41 to 45 years old and 46 to 50 years old carried a percentage of 2.3% and 1.4%, respectively.

Based on the findings of the age demographic, the majority of the respondents are aged 25 years and below, which is 83.7% (N=184) out of 220 respondents. This can be assumed that older generations were less likely to use social media in planning for a trip compared to the younger generation. As stated by Rameez (2015), using social media is the most common practice of today's younger generation. Social media like Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube offer youth a portal for entertainment and communication and have grown exponentially in recent years.

4.2 Use of Social Media

The majority of the respondents (78.2%) use social media almost every day. Only 1.8% of the respondents answered that they rarely use social media and 1.4% answered they use it sometimes per week. Lastly, 18.6% of the respondents said they use social media several times a day.

From the findings, it can be seen that the respondents use various types of social media including Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, Twitter and others. As mentioned by Xiang and Gretzel (2010), tourists nowadays use different sources and tools in order to plan for a vacation. The findings from this study showed that most of the respondents use Instagram 23.7% in planning for a trip. This result was supported by Germon et al. (2017) that Instagram plays a vital role in the travel industry and could be advantageous for travel-related businesses, such as destination marketing organizations and travel agencies. Also, Instagram count as much as 285 million posts under '#travel' hashtag, and almost 1 million accounts on Instagram are searching for travel-related hashtags every week (Business Instagram, 2018).

Last but not least, one of the interesting findings found is that some of the respondents depend on social navigation tools (eg. Google Maps and Waze) to find a route or location. Waze combines GPS navigation capabilities with social sharing to get the most up-to-date traffic and travel conditions. As referred to Nugraha (2015), Waze has one of the unique features, which is chatting features in order for the users to share and talk about their journey. Thus, it can be concluded that Waze can be one of the essential tools for planning a trip.

4.3 Trip Planning Process

In order to understand the reason why people using social media during their travel process, the study conducted by Buhalis, Fotis and Rossides (2012) lists twelve statements, categorized by four trip stages: pre-destination choice, post-destination choice, during trip and post-trip.

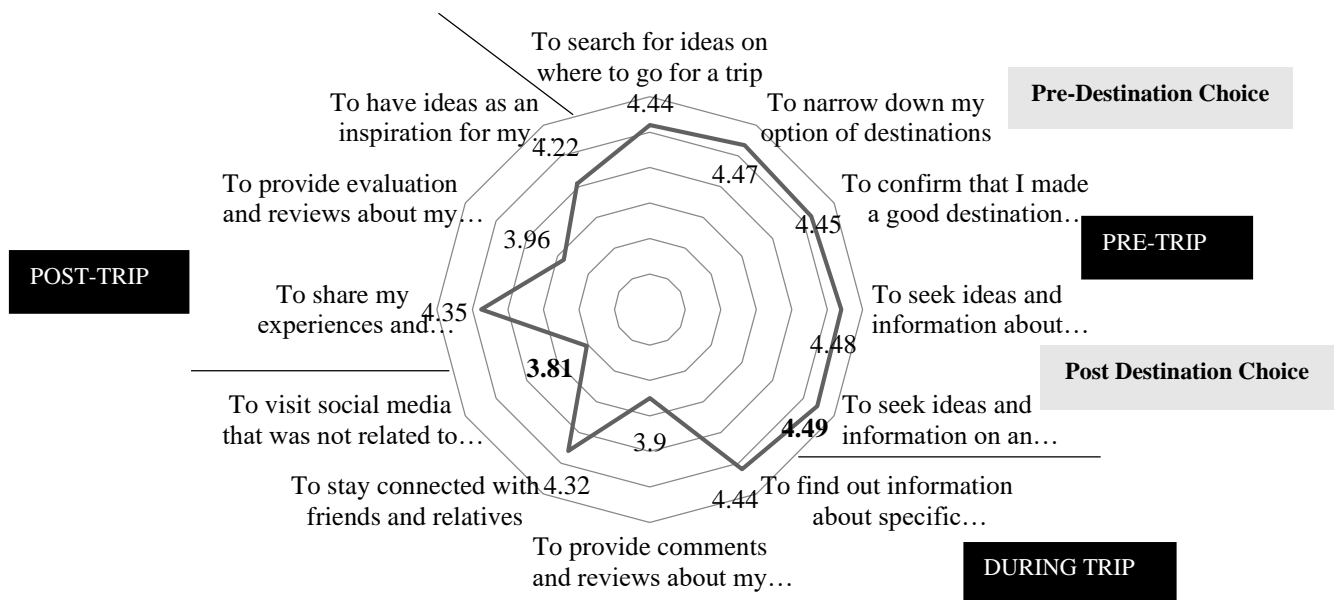


Figure 1: Trip Planning Process

This study shows that social media were used during all stages of the trip planning process. Based on figure 1, the domestic tourists' used social media predominantly before the trip stages to search for ideas regarding the travel destination, attractions, recreational activities, and accommodations. However, the previous study by Fotis, Buhalis and Rossides (2011), showed the opposite result, where their respondents used social media after the trip to share experiences and pictures to friends and relatives.

Before the trip of "pre-destination stage", most of the respondents used social media in order to narrow down the option of destinations with the mean of 4.47 and during "post-destination stage", the respondents usually used social media to seek ideas and information on an excursion and other leisure activities with the mean of 4.49.

During the trip, most of the respondents likely used social media to find out information about specific attractions and leisure activities with a mean of 4.44. Last but not least, after the trip or “post-destination choice”, social media has been used to share experiences and pictures with friends and other relatives with a mean of 4.35.

4.4 The Influence of Social Media

This study also intends to identify the social media influence on tourists’ travel plans. Based on the question, the respondent were asked to recall back their last trip to indicate whether social media has influenced the tourists’ travel plan.

Table 3: *Influence of Social Media*

Items	Percentage (%)			
	Not At All	Unlikely	Likely	Definitely
How likely are you to make a final decision to book a trip or travel product because of the influence of social media?	1.4	5.0	40.9	52.7
How likely are you to change your existing travel plans because of the influence of social media?	6.8	14.5	48.2	30.5

Based on Table 2, the findings of this study revealed that most of the respondents (52.7%) definitely make a final decision to book a trip or travel product because of the influence of social media. Similarly, Cox et al. (2009) also indicate that social media influenced 51% of the respondents to make a final decision relating to booking a trip or travel product. Besides that, for the second question, 48.2% of the respondents likely to change their existing travel plans because of the influence of social media. The study by Fotis, Buhalis and Rossides (2011) found that 49.5% of the respondents likely to make some changes in their existing travel plan. Thus, it can be concluded that the credibility of social media is vital in influencing the respondents towards the traveler's trip planning process (Yulin, 2016).

4.5 The Perceived Level of Trust

In order to understand the reason why people using social media during their travel process, the study conducted by Buhalis, Fotis and Rossides (2012) lists twelve statements, categorized by four trip stages: pre-destination choice, post-destination choice, during trip and post-trip.

Table 3: *Perceived level of trust*

I trust information about the holidays provided by...	Mean	Standard deviation	Ranking
(N=210, 7-point Likert scale: 1=Strongly Disagree, 5= ,7 = Strongly Agree)			
Friends and relatives	5.70	1.070	1
Information provided by the other tourists on the internet	5.35	1.110	4
Information on social media	5.40	1.165	3
Official tourism websites	5.70	1.189	2
Travel agencies	5.32	1.296	5
Advertisements on TV, radio, newspaper or magazine	5.30	1.261	6

In addition, the researchers also analyzed the perceived level of trust towards social media compared to traditional sources of holiday-related information. As displayed in Table 3, social media was ranked as third out of six travel information sources. This study revealed that the respondents still trust the information provided by the official tourism website as it is ranked first and the information from friends or relatives ranked second with the same value of the mean. Similarly, the findings by Cox et al. (2009) also found that tourism official tourism websites have slightly higher of the perceived level of trust compare to social media. Even though the findings of this study indicate the social media is ranked as third place, it can be suggested that most of the respondents still trust and depend on social media as there is only a slight difference between the mean of the three items. The official tourism websites and friends and relatives shared the same mean of 5.70 while the mean for social media is 5.30. Thus, it can be suggested that the respondents still rely on social media in order to search for information related to travel purposes as it is easy and convenient to use.

5. CONCLUSION

This study identified the influence of social media towards the trip planning process for pre-destination choice, post destination choice, during trip and post-trip. This study also examined the use of social media, social media influence and perceived the respondents'

level of trust towards social media.

This study was conducted in order to understand at which stage the domestic tourists in Malaysia would be using social media for their trip planning process and the influence of social media towards their trip decision. Furthermore, this research also contributed by providing a better understanding of domestic tourists' behavior for marketing purposes. Based on this study, marketing strategies can be strategized to promote Pahang as one of the popular destinations for domestic tourism.

There are several limitations to this study. The respondents of this study were only focused on the domestic tourists to Pahang. For future study, researchers can replicate this study with larger representative samples from other demographic segments to include domestic tourists from other states, international, inbound or outbound tourists.

It is recommended for future researchers to add translations of the questionnaire in other languages such as Mandarin and Tamil as Malaysia is a multiracial country. Some of the respondents might not understand English well so it will be better if there are translations in their mother tongue.

Lastly, the government of Malaysia promoted domestic tourism aggressively through several campaigns, namely 'Cuti-Cuti Malaysia', 'Zoom Malaysia' and the latest 'Cuti-Cuti Malaysia Dekat Je' (Tourism Malaysia Integrated Promotion Plan, 2018). Besides that, Tourism Malaysia aims to encourage domestic tourists to stay at paid accommodation and increase domestic tourism expenditure through meeting, incentives, conference and exhibition (MICE) segment (Tourism Malaysia Integrated Promotion Plan, 2018).

In conclusion, this study shows that social media are used at all levels of stages of the trip planning process (pre-destination choice, post destination choice, during the trip and after the trip). Contrasting to the findings by Cox et al. (2009), which found that social media are mainly used during the trip, however, this study revealed that the domestic tourists' used social media predominantly before the trip stages (pre and post destination choice). Thus, organizations and marketing team from the tourism and hospitality industry in Malaysia is encouraged to use social media as one of their marketing tools and channel to promote and attract more tourists by providing more information online.

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