

THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA TOWARDS VISIT SARAWAK YEAR 2019 AS TOURIST DESTINATION

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This article discusses the impact of social media towards Visit Sarawak 2019 as tourist destination. The study uses qualitative method through interview sessions with tourists that are selected randomly using social media platform. Based on the findings, most of the tourists used social media and online platforms to get information for visiting Sarawak. It is hope that this study can help to boost tourism industry in Sarawak in the future by including several guidelines of promotional strategies based on social media and tourists behavioural framework.

Keywords: Social Media, Visit Sarawak 2019 Campaign, Tourist Behaviour, Tourism, Promotion

1. INTRODUCTION

Social media has changed the social interactions among people around the world. We begin with an outline of key trends and conclude with a perspective on the rate of adoption of social media relative to other modern communication technologies. Facebook, the largest social media platform in the world, has over 2.4 billion users. Other social media platforms including YouTube and WhatsApp also have more than one billion users each. Those numbers are huge and there are 7.7 billion people in the world, with at least 3.5 billion of us are online users. This means that social media platforms are used by one-in-three people in the world, and more than two-thirds of all internet users. (Ortiz, 2019)

Social media sites are the favorites among specific population of groups. In general, young people are more likely to use social media than older people. However, some other platforms are much more popular among younger generations especially the millennials. In fact, in most of developed countries, where access to the internet is nearly universal, most young adults are using it. If today's young adults continue using social media throughout their life, then it is likely that social media will continue growing rapidly as internet adoption expands throughout lower income countries.

Social media has fundamentally changed the way many companies communicate with their target market demographics. Travel and tourism industry for instance, has risen their popularity of travel marketing through the social media channels. From the way travellers research potential destinations to the activities that they participate in once they arrived at their chosen destinations. This new social media influences have made the purchasing decisions of the tourism marketing from start to finish. There are five ways tourism has been impacted, such as travel research transformed, rise in social sharing, enhanced customer service, reshaping travel agencies and changing loyalty programs. Thus, this article looks into the impact of social media that is found to be one of the platforms used by tourists or online community when making decisions for their future travels (Mangan, 2020).

2. BACKGROUND

The research is based in Sarawak. It is also known as 'the Land of Hornbills', and it is the largest state in Malaysia. Sarawak's vast green landscape is filled with natural assets that include intricate cave systems, exotic wildlife and lush rainforests, which contain some of the most diverse and well-preserved ecosystems in the world. Populated by at least 28 ethnic groups, Sarawak is a land of different cultures and lifestyles.



Figure 1: Map of Sarawak

In relation to tourism industry, Sarawak Tourism Board (STB) actively promoting Sarawak to the world. STB works relentlessly to realize its main objective of positioning Sarawak as a prime destination for culture, adventure, nature, food and festival or CANFF in short. As one of the leading tourism agencies in Sarawak, STB has geared their effort to attract more than five million tourists in the state in the year 2019. Sarawak also offers an alternative for those seeking humble authentic experience. As part of the promotion agenda by STB, “Visit Sarawak Year 2019” logo was designed through integration of symbols of Sarawak nature and wildlife.



Figure 2: Visit Sarawak Year 2019 Logo

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

3.1 Tourism

Tourism, the act and process of spending time away from home in pursuit of recreation, relaxation and pleasure while making use of the commercial provision of services. As such, tourism is a product of modern social arrangements, beginning in western Europe in the 17th century, although it has antecedents in Classical antiquity. Tourism overlaps with other activities, interest, and processes, including, for example, pilgrimage. This gives rise to shared categories, such as business tourism, sport tourism and medical tourism (Walton, 2018).

At some point, tourism is the activities of people traveling to and staying in places outside their usual environment for leisure, business or other purposes. It is a dynamic and competitive industry that requires the ability to adapt constantly to customer changes needs and desires as the customer's satisfaction, safety and enjoyment are particularly the focus of tourism business (Direct Tourism Services, 2019).

3.2 Malaysia Tourism

Malaysia is a very diverse country with multiracial and religions where Malays, Indians, Chinese and many other ethnic groups live together in peace and harmony. Malaysia has made a multiculturalism and home to hundreds of colourful festivals. Thus, it shows how Malaysian love celebrating and socialising. According to Tourism Malaysia (2019), there are five types of tourism; 'Culture Heritage Tourism', 'Adventure Tourism', 'Medical Tourism', 'Beach Tourism' and 'Agricultural Tourism'.

3.3 Sarawak Tourism

Sarawak Tourism was incorporated under the Sarawak Tourism Board (Incorporation) Ordinance in 12 November 1994. Sarawak Tourism Board is set up for making Sarawak the naturally preferred tourism destination to the world. As the tagline for Visit Sarawak is "More to Discover", there are many attractions and activities that are available for tourists when visiting Sarawak. The Sarawak Tourism Board is working on improving their existing strategies and plans. "Having set the target of five million visitors' arrivals to Sarawak, they are confident that the intensive marketing and promotional campaigns of Sarawak Tourism Board in domestic markets and the ASEAN region, should be achievable." said the CEO of tourism board (Borneo Talk, 2019).

The function of Tourism board of Sarawak is to stimulate and promote tourism to and within Sarawak as a tourist destination. There are hundreds or even thousands of different things to do in Sarawak, not just 10. STB has break down 10 top fascinating themes across three regions in Sarawak.

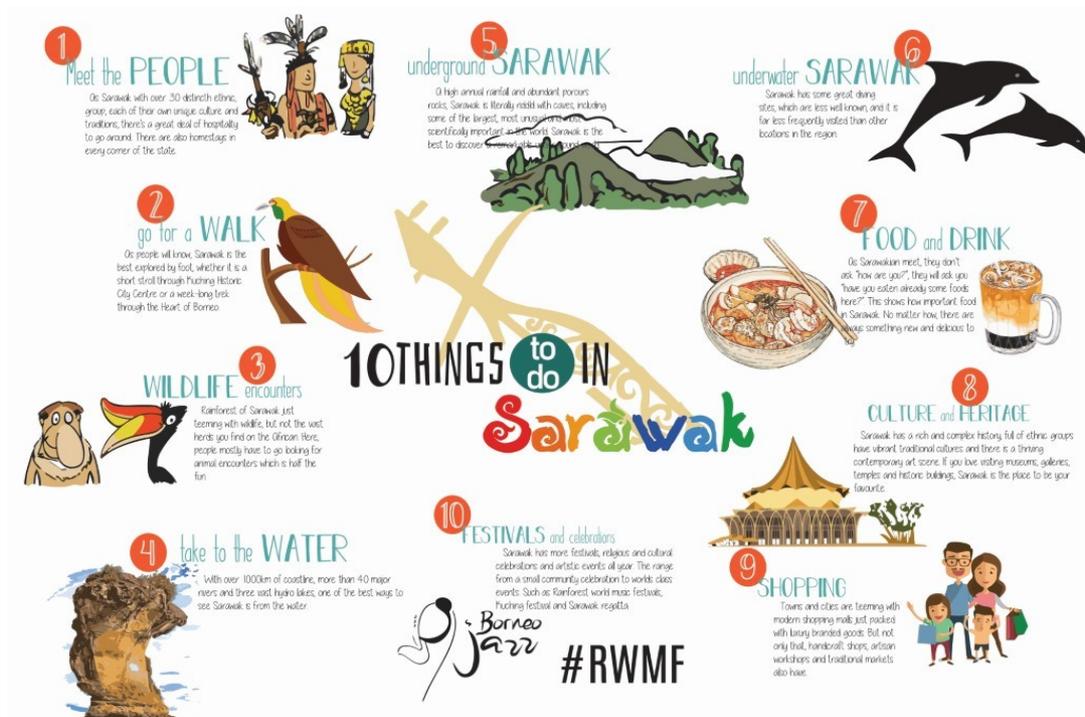


Figure 3: 10 Thing to do in Sarawak (Source: Sarawak Tourism Board)

The main pillars of Sarawak as a tourist destination is CANFF which stands for culture, adventure, nature, food and festivals. All these things combined make Sarawak a destination that is highly unique and can help travel professionals create an unforgettable experience for their clients.

3.4 Social Media

Social media brought about remarkable impact on the internet usage due to its vast amount of information being disseminated by the Web 2.0. Individuals from around the globe can share and disseminate information using social media tools regarding any product or service industry (Pietro, Virgilio & Pantano, 2012).

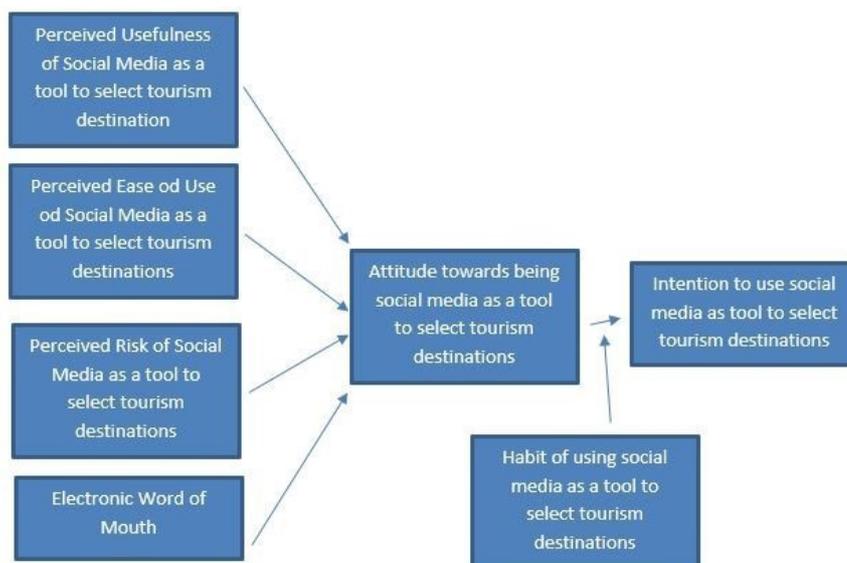


Figure 4: Research framework from Social Media as a Tool to help Select Tourism Destinations: The Case of Malaysia (source: Hua et.al., 2017)

This section addresses a promotion strategy that can be used by place markers to reach its target market. Social media is all about facilitating people to express and share ideas, thoughts, and opinions with others. It is also about enabling people to connect with others like they were doing for the last thousands of years. However, what is of significance is that social media: (a) removed spatial and time constraints that were inherent in traditional methods of communications; (b) provided online tools that enable one too many sharing of multimedia content; and (c) employ easy to use interfaces that enable even non-specialist to share and connect (John, 2015). According to Xiang, Magnini, & Fesenmaier. (2015), in 2014 social media are enjoying a phenomenal success through Facebook, Twitter and You Tube.

Table 1: The use of social media and its impacts on consumer behavior (Voramontri & Klieb, 2019)

Facebook	1.3 Billion
Twitter	225 Million
You Tube	6 Billion

Facebook, a social media networking website, claims that its active users reached 1.3 billion worldwide, more than 50% of which log in every day in 2014. Twitter, a micro-

blogging website hosts 225 million users who post on average 500 million tweets per day more than 1 billion unique users visit You Tube each month, watching more than 6 billion hours of video. The internet has changed the way people lead their life. The total number of internet users was less than 1% in early 90's, now it is increased to more than 3 billion in 2016. Inexpensive cell phones and broadband connections are the driving factors for the reach of the internet. Information available on the internet as limitless with relatively at lower cost and effort. The online tourism is referred as comprising all such informational entities (e.g. links, web pages) to relate to travel. A conceptual framework on online tourism domain develop by facilities the interaction of tourist with travel planning industries. The role of the internet was emphasized as mediating technologies in representing tourism. These advantages become the driving factors for tourist in decision making and planning. It also plays an essential role in their overall travel experience (Rathore, Joshi, & Ilavarasan, 2017).

3.5 The impact of social media on the tourism industry

Social media marketing within an organization determines how the company users social networking resources like Facebook, Twitter and YouTube to achieve the organization's marketing objective. The strategy incorporates and supports higher-level plans, which offer business and consumer knowledge that is used for organizational strategy creation and adjustment (Oyza and Edwin, 2015). In this research, Sarawak Tourism Board is the main organization that lead Sarawak tourism to the world. The impact of social media that stated usage of social media in Madhya Pradesh is enhancing the web-based means to make it more interactive for both the attendants and prospective visitors alike (Pandey, Mishra & Shukla, 2014). This may also be relevant to Sarawak Tourism. In Madhya Pradesh Tourism, the website provides a detailed collection of information on various places of interest, hotels, tours, attractions, events, destinations, and other travel-related current & updated information.

3.6 Tourist Behaviour

Tourist behaviour or consumer behaviour includes certain choices; behaviours, and also ideas or experiences that satisfy the needs and desires of consumers (Solomon, 1996). This concerns with all activities directly involved in the purchase, use and disposal of goods and services, including the decision process preceding and following those actions (Engel, Blackwell & Miniard, 1995). Knowledge regarding travel behaviour can assists in marketing and product planning and development which can increase the number of visitors to tourism product (Cohen, 2019).

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research was conducted using qualitative research methods. The researcher used random sampling of participants from social media respondents through Instagram. The aim of this approach is to ensure that the data and information collected from the respondents are more broadly and systematically. The outcome of the data collected through Visit Sarawak 2019 Campaign are analysed so that it can be improved in the future.

5. RESEARCH FINDINGS

In the findings, the researcher picked up random ten selected respondents from social media channel specifically Instagram for the pilot test.

5.1 Demographic of tourists

Table 2 shows the demographic information for the tourists which was conducted through Instagram interview.

Table 2: Demographic profile and travel information of each respondent

No.	Accompany (Total No.)	Age	Duration of stay (day)	Gender	Place of Residence	Time of visit
1	3	35	4	Female	Kuala Lumpur	During school holiday
2	2	29	2	Female	Kota Kinabalu, Sabah	First time
3	2	32	10	Female	Canada	First time
4	2	25	6	Female	Poland	First time
5	6	26	4	Female	Indonesia	One time Every year
6	1	43	5	Male	Miri, Sarawak	Every event that happening in Sarawak
7	2	29	3	Male	Sabah	Every event that happening in Sarawak
8	2	50	4	Male	Sabah	Depends on event in Sarawak
9	20	33	7	Male	Italy/Singapore	First time
10	4	28	3	Male	Indonesia	Every event that happening in Sarawak

5.2 Discussion

Tourist perception trip

According to Table 2, the respondents who visited Sarawak more than one times are more than first time visitors. The tourists also expressed wanting to travel to the city because of many happening events organized on the month of their trip. So, the trip was planned well as their itinerary. As for the first-time tourist, most of the respondents had no itinerary to follow. They are likely simply wanting to travel to the city to look around and to explore Sarawak freely. The trip experience was summarized under the theme's "event", "free exploration", "local food", "site seeing" and "relax". From the information that these tourist respondents shared, there are a lot of pictures taken during their trip in Sarawak. According to the tourists, travel to Sarawak is easy and most of the place that they wanted to go are also nearby. Thus, this shows how most respondents expected to have a relaxing journey during their trips. They also already prepared the list of food that are recommended by their friends on social media.

Based on their feedback the most popular food or dishes are Sarawak laksa Mi Kolo and Kek lapis which mostly are recommended by their social media channels. In addition, six of the respondents stated that photography is one of the factors to visit the state of Sarawak. They mentioned that, they went to Sarawak because of the events that are happening around Sarawak. In reference to their photos in their Instagram, the photos taken not only symbolises their memories of their journey in Sarawak, but indirectly, also promoted Sarawak through it among other global tourists.

Local food

All of the tourists shared their experiences about various types of Sarawak food they tried during their travel journey. They ate a wide variety of typical local food found in Sarawak. The respond from their photo caption was quite positive. One of the respondents said that; "Sarawak Laksa is the most noticeably Sarawakian food in Kuching. It has a base of sambal belacan, sour tamarind, garlic, galangal, lemon grass and coconut milk. Topped with omelette strips. Chicken strips, prawns, fresh coriander and optionally lime. Ingredients such as fried tofu or other seafood are not traditional but are sometimes added. Another respondent also commented;" Not only that "Laksa Sarawak so good even in the airport".

Events

As people know there are many big events that happening in Sarawak such as AIFFA, Sarawak International Festival of Music and Arts, Borneo Jazz Music, Rainforest Music World Festival (RWMF) and Borneo international Kites but mostly the famous event is the RWMF. Mostly, the respondent is going to that event stated.

“We know that Rainforest World Music Festival from my friends, but not sure to go then I saw a lot of Instagram stories hype about it, Checked out their Instagram page and even saw the ticket price through someone Instagram also then we decided to go. It is my first time I absolutely loved it. Can’t wait to go again next year. The festival nothing like I have been before. Really live up to international standard.”

(Respondent 2)

“Last weekend's trip to Borneo was full of emotions! It was my first time in Sarawak, got to see one of the world's greatest primates “Orangutans” meaning the humans of the jungle! I also got to run Spartan Beast Race! 21km throughout one of the world's least explored rainforests. An experience worth living! Finally had the best time with the friends I went with and all the new people I met.”

(Respondent 9)

6. CONCLUSION

This study aims to better understand how tourists perceived a destination especially in visiting Sarawak via social media. The tourism industry must take advantage of social media as the industry largely give impact to spread the information in short terms around the world. Social media plays a very important role in the tourism industry especially as a marketing tool. Based on current findings, it shows that most of the tourists used social media as part of their research tools before visiting any uncommon places such as Sarawak. Instagram has been a good promotion strategy as it indirectly promotes places of interests whenever someone posted their travel journey photos. Apart from that, most tourists especially the first-timer tourist prefers to have more relaxing and enjoyable travel around cities as most cities has an interconnected facilities and transportations that eases their travel. In the next stage of this research, the researcher will further investigate on in depth perceptions of tourists around Sarawak especially Kuching area throughout the “Visit Sarawak Year 2019”. This research will help to determine the social media tools used among visitors which increase their travel behaviour when they visited Sarawak.

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