Social Network Marketing Practices: Special Reference of Hotel Industry in Jaffna District

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Abstract
The gestation of information and communication technologies, especially Internet, has a momentous influence on the prolific changes in the use of marketing tools. Web 2.0 has marked a shift towardstaking responsibility by users on the Internet, which resulted in the increasing importance of customers and the decreasing authority of marketers. This paper analyses the basic awesome practices of the social network usage and its contribution of social network for the success of the hotel business in Jaffna District. This is qualitative exploratory research; explain the phenomenon of social network usage in the hotel business in Jaffna. Purposive sampling technique was used as sampling method, primary data collection method was used to collect the data, and structured interview was conducted with the 20 hotel managers in the Jaffna district.

This study reveals the social network usage is in the embryonic stage and practices under the four categories as Social media, Interactive Relationship, Word of mouth and E-commerce. It was recognized the worth pursuing of the use of social network by hotel business. Social network are especially decisive for tourism, which is information-intensive activity. It was recommended to the hotel business that the Social network can be used to inspire, inform, engage, facilitate at destination, remember, share and engage and non-acceptance of the use of social network by hotel management will cause a decrease in their competitive advantage.

Key word: Business success, Hotel industry, Social network,

1. Introduction
Social network marketing is a rapidly growing and developing arena. Social networks are websites which allow users to communicate, share knowledge about similar interests, discuss favorite topics, review and rate products/services, etc. Even though social network marketing is still in its infancy, it holds a potential success for businesses if it is carefully integrated in the marketing mix. The latest phenomenon of marketing involves the usage of social network platforms. Social network is progressively being used for sharing information and for networking among industries.

Social network is being used extensively by all industries around the world at present, and Sri Lanka is a prime example of a nation using social network to optimize its sector. Social network contribute a lot for the success of the organization. Organizations produces high quality and affordable product, because of the severe competition most of the organizations espouse customizationits activities. This situation ignites towards social network marketing. Social network is commonly described as involving two key actions, that is, socialization and sharing, and the different types of social networks directly relates to these actions. This paper will attempt to understand the practices behind social network communication, determine whether it is profitable for hotel industry to promote their services via the social network platforms, and determine the future development plans to capture the business opportunities and pitfalls of social network marketing in hotel business.

2. Literature Review
2.1 Social Network
The era of Web 2.0 is upon us. The Web 2.0 platform is a networked world supporting individual users creating content individually and collectively, sharing and updating information and knowledge use sophisticated, diverse sharing devices and tools. In the past year, there has been enormous hype in the media about the growth of Web 2.0 and the use of social networking by the millennial generation.
According to literature review, the most important interactions in a virtual community are: identification, satisfaction, Continuance Participation, Community Promotion and loyalty, the Web 2.0 as a participatory marketing tool. The following figure shows the web 2.0 landscape (Erragcha & Romdhane, 2014).

Figure 1: web 2.0 landscape

Source: Erragcha & Romdhane, 2014

The above figure explains the web 2.0 outlets, digital social networks (DSN) is the subset of web 2.0. In sociology, social networks are defined as “infrastructures that enable individuals to meet or communicate” Erragcha & Romdhane (2014). Forsé defines social networks as “a set of relationships between a set of actors (Forsé, 2008, p. 10). DSNs is an information systems enabling individualsto create profiles, view their friends and share different contents. Facilitating exchanges between users is the main goal of digital social networks. Vetter (2011) clarifies that “digital social networks participate in connecting individuals, organizations, in promoting knowledgesharing, developing digital identities, exchanging ideas, values, the Web 2.0 phenomenon marks the emergence of a new paradigm of communication and reflects the shift from interactivity to interaction, thus contributing to the construction of networks that are no longer based on the simple exchange of information but on the sharing of knowledge.

Social networking sites are instruments for building virtual communities, or social networks, for individuals or business. As social network usage has increased in recent times as a medium of communication, the use of social network seems to be an effective marketing tool (Baker, 2009). From business point of view, social networking enables the connection with new client and expanding business size as most sites allows customization of web page and provide links to personal website related with specific business (Carter, 2006). The emergence of the internet has tremendously changed the consumers’ lifestyle especially the young consumers in their shopping patterns. Most social networking sites also provide other means of online communications, such as email, Facebook, YouTube, twitter, Google plus, MySpace, instant messaging, chat, web blogs, discussion group, and others. Dwyer, Hiltz, and Passerini (2007) advise that the main motivation for social networking is
communication and maintaining relationships. Social networking have established solid user bases, and, in turn, have created concerns regarding the user privacy and protection.

2.2 Social networking in Hotel industry

With the introduction and the diffusion of the interactive Web 2.0 features and applications, tourists everywhere see the potential for new technologies to improve their ability to make travel plans (Sheldon, 1998; Smith & Jenner, 1998) and Web marketing is gradually becoming mainstream (Buhalisi, 2003). Perhaps marketing and distribution are the most affected business functions from the technological revolution (Buhalisi, & Law, 2008). New online technologies within the tourism industry have significantly impacted on communications, transactions and relationships between the various industry operators and with the customer, as well as between regulators and operators (Galloway, Mochrie and Deakins, 2004; Sharma, Carson and De Lacy, 2000; Sheldon, 1998; Werthner and Klein, 1999a).

In Sri Lanka all hotels have adopted the social network marketing in their business. This gestation is very important, because the customers for the hotels are definitely faraway from hotels, that is customers may be nationals or internationals. Mostly they have a purpose to visit and they must be middle or high income people, so they can be very familiar with the social networking system. It is manifest to creep the social network marketing in Sri Lanka. After the postwar, there are many decisive gestations going on. There are remarkable and momentous changes in infrastructure and all industries. In this path, emergence of hotels in Jaffna district is utmost figments for society. Recently there are increasing trend in tourist visit to Jaffna district. They are coming from major cities or foreign countries. They want to communicate via the network. So it is prime arousal to the social network marketing to hotels in Jaffna District. Some of the most important activities can engage on the social networks are: Building and maintaining communities of interests, Collecting user-generated content, Displaying photography and video, Distributing topical news stories, Encouraging word-of-mouth recommendations, and Getting feedback

3. Statement of the Problem

End of civil war in Sri Lanka tremendous development and it is an expression of existing social, political, economic and cultural structures. Understanding the social network marketing is essential to design more appropriate marketing planning in the hotel industry. Such strategies provide the chance for the new marketers for understanding market situation and consumer behavior to countenance in new market opportunities. Nowadays social network marketing is the one of the major determinant of business success in hotels of foreign countries. In Sri Lanka hotels situated in cities are enhanced very deeply the social network marketing strategies. In Jaffna district it is important to ripen the social network marketing in the hotel industry.

A significant body of research is attentive on the social network marketing showing this is a major factor for the success of hotel business. Keeping track of limited research in Sri Lanka on this issue, this study endeavors to investigate the social network marketing in Jaffna District. Despite the increasing research prominence of social network marketing, no one studies have been conducted in the social network marketing regarding hotel industry in Jaffna district. While evidence of the business success of hotels is related with the social network in other foreign countries, no such relationship has been investigated in Sri Lankan hotels.” “This study tries to espouse the social network marketing practices regarding hotels in Jaffna District.”

4. Research significance

End of the war crafts peace environment in Sri Lanka. There are more opportunities for industrial expansions in Jaffna District. This industrial enlargement will create more market opportunities to the hotels. Local and foreign tourist desires to visit to Jaffna District. Social network Marketing practices are based on industry characteristics and the characteristics of marketing environment. Therefore it is significant to study the unique characteristics of the social network marketing practices in the Jaffna
District. There is lack of academic studies on the on social network marketing to hotels in Jaffna District

ICTs also help tourists to overcome risks regarding tourism residence choice, such as monetary risks, functional risks, physical risks, social risks, and psychological risks Katsoni (2014). New online technologies within the Hotel business have significantly impacted on communications, transactions and relationships between the various industry operators and with the customer, as well as between regulators and operators (Galloway, Mochrie and Deakins, 2004; Sharma, Carson and De Lacy, 2000). The present study fills the theoretical gap in the investigating of social network marketing practices with the phenomenology research approach. Social network marketing is still in its embryonic stage, it holds a potential success for businesses. This paper discusses the social network marketing practices regarding hotels in Jaffna District.

5. Research question
It is very imperative to disseminate information through social network to audience regarding the services given by the hotels; Effective communication and convenience service through social network leads to business success. In this way researcher forms research questions as:

i. What are the prevailing practices of social network in hotels in Jaffna district

ii. How the social network marketing contribute to the success of hotel industry in Jaffna district?

6. Research Objectives
To understand the key marketing environmental challenges and changes in social network marketing practices, draw on existing good practice in Jaffna District for marketing planning and programming in these areas, to maximize the positive contribution of marketing strategy for sustaining existing industries for capture the potential market in the environment.

i. To understand the existing usages and influences of social network marketing of hotel industry in Jaffna District

ii. To recognize the social network marketing contribution to the success of hotel industry in Jaffna district

7. Methodology
This qualitative research is concerned with ‘developing explanations of social phenomena. Researcher conducts exploratory research and uses exploration of the existing certain phenomena. It analyzes the practices of existing and ideas to the future. This research describes the "subjective reality" of a system; it is the study of a phenomenon.

Researcher utilized primary data collection methods. The population for this research was the hotels in Jaffna district. Purposive sampling method will be used to collect data. Twenty hotels are considered to collect data from Jaffna district. Unit of analysis is selected hotels. The research instrument was structured interview; it consists of series of open ended questions and broad questions. The respondents were Directors of selected hotels. Interview question and purpose is given in Table 1.

| Q1. Are you using social network system, If yes which type of network tool you are using? Which social network tools improve the interaction among customers and hotel? | To identify the participation about the social network To identify the tools which improve the interaction among customers and hotels To identify the understanding of the hotel directors about customers |
| Q2. What types of room booking system you have? a) Direct b) Online c) Both Can you say the % of customers booking through | To know the online system usage in hotels To know the customers from the online system To identify the contribution of Social network system |
Do you agree that social network systems are mostly contributed to book the rooms?

Q3. Are you facing any barriers or problems to use social networking system?

To diagnose the problems of social network system

Q4. Do you feel this social networking system is very important for your marketing success? If yes why?

To identify the importance of networking system for marketing success

Q5. Do you think the effectiveness of social network can be measurable? What are the indicators to measure the effectiveness of SN?

To identify whether effectiveness of social network is measurable

Q6. Do you have any idea to develop this networking system in future?

To identify the factors which can be used to assess the effectiveness of SN

To know the Future development plan of networking system

### 8. Result and Discussion

#### 8.1 Social network tool which improve the participation and interaction of customers with Hotel

By 2013, many well-known social network platforms existed such as web online pages, Facebook, LinkedIn, e-mail, Twitter, YouTube, Pinterest, Google plus, and Blog. Social network which improve the interaction among the customers and hotels were identified using question Q1 of the Table 1.

Table 2: Social networking tools

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tools</th>
<th>Usage %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Web online</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Face book</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YouTube</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blog</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Google +</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e-mail</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LinkedIn,</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pinterest</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Twitter</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The result given in table 2 indicates that web online and e-mail are considered the effective and mostly used tool (100%) to improve interaction among the hotel and customers. The next most effective tool is YouTube (70%). According to the study, Facebook is also an effective tool since it includes some of the collaboration tools such as wiki, forums and online message. It is particularly important in the age of rapid expansion and tremendous popularity of social networking sites. Social network advertising is flourishing in the era of Web 2.0 end-user interaction.

According to one director of hotel “social network can be used as an effective tool to interact with customers. Further he stated that the younger generation is familiar with Facebook, it could be utilized for business purpose rather than merely used for entertainment purposes”

The comment of the other director is “now we get many comments regarding our services through the our social networks which is positive and negative. we engender new and improved services to our hotel management by reviewing this comments.”

Another manager explains “we can understand how many people use the social network sites with the information of reviews, comments and citations. Actually it is highly effective tools in the marketing communication”
Perception of Directors about the customers interest in Social network

By using the open-ended question Q2 in table 1 the perception of directors about the customers’ interest in social network marketing were identified and the finding have been given in table 3

Table 3: interests in Social network

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Agree/ Disagree</th>
<th>Directors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The result indicates that though 80 % of the directors emphasized that they prefer to have a social network rather than direct communication. In fact some of the directors have a perception that Sri Lankan customers are not interested in social network but all foreign customers are fully incorporated with social networking system. Some of the comments from directors who agreed the question Q6 are given below.

“Now customers have good knowledge in computer usage and they can save their time using social network”. “Foreign people is high exposure to novel technologies; they are very familiar with social network”.” “Today the young generation in Sri Lanka and all foreign people are familiar with the social networking and technology mediated communication”.

According to some of the directors who disagree with the question Q2 in table 1 dependency of traditional communication in the Sri Lanka. Particularly after the period of local war(2009) infrastructure have been buildings up, but still in starting point. The directors’ comments which support this opinion are given blow.

“Majority of customers in Sri Lanka wants traditional face to face communication.” “Online social network system is not trustable one, huge message can be delivered through social network, it is hard to scan the proper one, With the online booking system, the cancellation of booking is higher rate, there is need to process penalty payment system. It will damage the customer relationship”. “However, some of directors emphasized the fact that the necessity of social network depends on several factors such as customers’ attitude, ICT knowledge, etc”. “Customers in IT stream prefer internet marketing. They want to engage via laptop, mobile phone, etc.”

8.1 To diagnose the problems faced by the hotels regarding the social networking system

After the war in 2009, there has been huge development in infrastructure including technological improvement. Over the last two years high tremendous changes in marketing in the Jaffna district. Higher level foreign and local people have been visiting to Jaffna. This positive trend in tourism creates the hotels needs develop their business with technology based marketing. When they build up the technology based social network marketing hotels want to faces some problem. The hotel managers were mentioned answers for the by the question Q3 in table 1:

According to the one of the director with the new technological practices the credibility of the information online is doubtful; overload of useless information is also in social network communications as comments and reviews.

Another manager explained that there is possibility to forge for particular interests by unscrupulous competitors, we are using many online systems so there is no privacy in our business,” One of hotel manager told “in addition to the usual in the technology arena, lack of resources or skill shortages are the most reported issues.

8.2 Identify the importance of networking system for marketing success and Assess the effectiveness of Social network

The social network system play different roles in the hotel business, all managers accepted the social networking systems the most prominent factor for the success of hotel business. Hotel managers mentioned, that social network create awareness about hotels; promote business, interactive communication, customer relationship, customer satisfaction, customer retention and loyalty. Based on the result of the question Q5 in table 1, several indicators were put forwarded to assess the effectiveness of social network by managers of Hotels. One manager of hotel business is in the increasing profit and
performance after the using the social network system, another manager explained customer comments, reviews ultimately the involvements and loyalty is increasing through the social network system. Another manager emphasizes that the easy, prompt and convenience services through the social network system instigate the customer satisfaction. All managers accepted and mentioned social network is effective communication tool for destination marketing to reach the information and create the awareness about the hotels. Further all hotels managers accepted the social network system is an innovative and improved technological adaptation for the success and long term sustainability.

8.6 Future development plan of networking system of hotels
There is positive trend in tourism arrival to Jaffna District. Social network marketing is very cheap and effective communication tools to the hotels industry, because definitely the people far away from the Jaffna district want to access the hotel residence. They wanted proper information regarding hotel facilities in Jaffna district. The question Q6 in table 1 is regarding the future development of social network in hotels: mangers answers are:

“We have huge plan to develop the social network now we have online web, YouTube, Facebook, twitter, further we have planned to develop the Google +, weblog etc”. “We have only the online booking, we understand the YouTube, Facebooktwitter are very essential tool to success of hotel business, and very nearly we will create these innovated technologies in business”. “We know that the word of mouth is very important for business prospects, Facebook, twitter are the e-word of mouth, so definitely we will develop new tech based social working system to business”. “We have more demand from foreign people, so it is essential to display our facilities to the customer via YouTube, Facebook etc”.

Social network mustbe managedas a joint communication from bothsales and marketing in future. Social media demands a strategy, and not simply an assortment of disjointed practitioner tactics.

Conclusion
The emergence of Web 2.0 brings the concept of social networking and applies it to the hotel industry. A variety of the more popular social network marketing platforms have been used by all industries. The overall aim of this article is to study the potentials of social network marketing and to assess to what extent social network marketing contributes to strengthen the idea of the communication and network commons and a commons-based information society to the hotel industry in Jaffna district and follow a phenomenology research interest being based on practices in hotels in Jaffna district. The task of this research is to study the users’ knowledge, attitudes, and practices towards the potentials and risks of social network marketing. This study considered the primary study theory. This article reviewed the social network marketing usage in the hotel industry in Jaffna, the social network practices and effectiveness of Social network marketing to hotel industry in Jaffna district.

The findings reveal that the Directors of hotel have positive manner to utilize the social networking system, and they accepted the hotel customers are coming from the very far, they may be the first time visitors and haven’t experience regarding the hotel residences in Jaffna District, the social network play important roles as first the social network system gives the all services facilitated by the hotels as media service, this will be done by the YouTube, web pages Google plus etc, and check the 7ps system of hotel, as room services offered, prices, discounts, promotions, collaborative services as travel, tour guide, essential foods and other services etc. Secondly the interactive relationship and e-WOM check the actual practice of hotel services by e-word of mouth, it is possible by the Facebook, twitter and Linkin. Finally e-commerce social network facilitate the online booking system, cancellation system and penalty for cancellation. This study reveals that the social network marketing practices in hotels are under the four categories: Social media, Interactive Relationship, Word of mouth and E-commerce.

This study asserts that social network sites (SNSs) support hotels to develop and improve their marketing functions, as they can understand better their customers’ satisfaction and behavior, to reach
worldwide customers in a cost effective way, to engage in a direct dialogue with the customers and undertake corrective actions to improve their offering, and ultimately influence tourists’ destination choice. In this study the effectiveness of social network marketing is: Hotel performance improvement, Customer hotel interaction improvement, Customer satisfaction improvement and Hotel technical capability improvement. To this end, the role of social network or media is significance for hotel marketing.

References: