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SOCIAL MEDIA IN TOURISM AND HOSPITALITY: A LITERATURE REVIEW

Daniel Leung
Rob Law
Hubert van Hoof
Dimitrios Buhalis

ABSTRACT. Being one of the "mega trends" that has significantly impacted the tourism system, the role and use of social media in travelers' decision making and in tourism operations and management have been widely discussed in tourism and hospitality research. This study reviews and analyzes all extant social media-related research articles published in academic journals during 2007 to 2011, mainly in tourism and hospitality fields. Based on a content analysis on the analyzed articles from both the consumers' and the suppliers' perspectives, this article found that consumer-centric studies generally focused on the use and impact of social media in the research phase of the travelers' travel planning process. Supplier-related studies have concentrated closely on promotion, management, and research functions, but few discussed product distribution. Research findings thoroughly demonstrate the strategic importance of social media for tourism competitiveness. This study also contributes to the academia and industry by identifying some research voids in extant research and providing an agenda for future research.

KEYWORDS. Social media, Web 2.0, journal review, tourism research, hospitality research, consumers, suppliers

INTRODUCTION

Social media and Web 2.0 are two popular buzzwords as well as technological concepts, which have brought about pervasive changes in business-to-business communication, business-to-customer communication, and customer-to-customer communication (Kietzmann, Hermkens, McCarthy, & Silvestre, 2011). In this era of social media, the Internet has evolved from a broadcasting medium to a participatory platform which allows people to

Daniel Leung (E-mail: leung.daniel@connect.polyu.hk) and Rob Law (E-mail: rob.law@polyu.edu.hk) are in the School of Hotel and Tourism Management at The Hong Kong Polytechnic University, 17 Science Museum Road, Hung Hom, Hong Kong SAR, China.

Hubert van Hoof is in the School of Hospitality Management at The Pennsylvania State University in University Park, PA, USA (E-mail: hbv1@psu.edu).

Dimitrios Buhalis is in the International Centre for Tourism and Hospitality Research of the School of Tourism at Bournemouth University in Poole, Dorset, UK (E-mail: dbuhalis@bournemouth.ac.uk).

Address correspondence to: Daniel Leung at the above address.

become the "media" themselves for collaborating and sharing information (Li & Wang, 2011; Thevenot, 2007). On each day, more than 3 million photos are uploaded to Flickr, 5 million tweets, and a million new blog entries are posted on Twitter and other blog sites (Bodnar, 2010). These statistics distinctly demonstrate the prevalence of social media in our lives. Apparently, the "user democracy" culture and the ability to share information by means of social media have made substantial changes in information asymmetry and the bargaining power of consumers. While there are increasing concerns related to privacy issues and identity theft in social media usage, *TIME Magazine* named the Person of the Year in 2006 "You"—the website users (Arola, 2010), thereby acknowledging the democratizing potential of social media.

Being one of the two "mega trends" that can significantly impact the tourism system (the other one being search engines; Xiang & Gretzel, 2010), social media have been widely adopted by travelers to search, organize, share, and annotate their travel stories and experiences through blogs and microblogs (e.g., Blogger and Twitter), online communities (e.g., Facebook, RenRen, and TripAdvisor), media sharing sites (e.g., Flickr and YouTube), social bookmarking sites (e.g., Delicious), social knowledge sharing sites (e.g., Wikitravel), and other tools in a collaborative way. The newly released *World Travel Market 2011 Industry Report* announced that more than one-third of all leisure travelers in the United Kingdom choose their hotels on the basis of social media sites like TripAdvisor and Facebook (Koumelis, 2011).

Driven by user-generated content—including the ability to share photos, videos, and comments with other readers—academic scholars also noted the capacity of social media in helping tourism and hospitality companies to engage potential guests, increase their online presence, and thereby lead to greater online revenues. Wang and Fesenmaier (2004) illustrated that social media are useful for managing customer relations with their unique ability of attracting customers through in-depth, focused, and member-generated content, engaging customers through social interactions, and retaining

customers through relation building with other members. Dellarocas (2003) also suggested that social media provide tourism companies with unprecedented opportunities to understand and respond to consumer preferences. Through analyzing the comments on online communities such as TripAdvisor and Virtualtourist, hotels and other travel-related companies are able to better understand what their guests like and dislike about them and their competitors. In view of this rapidly growing trend and the potential benefits social media can offer, numerous hotel and tourism businesses have been integrating social media applications into their websites to enhance customers' travel information searching experience (Fuchs, Scholochov, & Höpken, 2009; Sánchez-Franco & Rondan-Cataluña, 2010).

Considering the important role of social media in both travelers' decision making as well as in tourism operations and management, a plethora of research on the application of social media in tourism and hospitality has been catalogued in refereed journals (e.g., Chan & Denizci Guillet, 2011; Li & Wang, 2011; Noone, McGuire, & Rohlfs, 2011; Xiang & Gretzel, 2010). Van Scotter and Culligan (2003) propose that academic research can benefit an industry by equipping it with the theoretical principles to guide practitioners' decisions. Indeed, research journals are an important and noncommercial distillation of accumulated and up-to-date knowledge in a discipline. Industry practitioners can apply empirical findings from academic research to their businesses in order to remain competitive. Besides, in order to keep researchers and practitioners informed about the latest development and practices in the field, Line and Runyan (2012) posited that it is necessary for academic scholars to regularly review prior research in their fields because revisiting extant research works on specific research areas can assist them in appreciating historical patterns and predicting future trends in the corresponding research areas. Song and Li (2008) reviewed 121 published articles on tourism demand modeling and forecasting from 2000 to 2007. Their study showed that there is no single model that consistently outperforms other models in all situations, and that the

forecasting accuracy can be improved by incorporating multiple approaches. In a review of 149 eTourism studies in a 20-year period from 1998 to 2007, Buhalis and Law (2008) exhibited the ubiquity and status quo of information technology in tourism marketing and management. Moreover, their work demonstrated that eTourism research was still in its infancy and a number of issues have not been addressed in the literature.

Despite the wide adoption of social media by both tourism consumers and suppliers in recent years (Chung & Buhalis, 2008; Leung, Lee, & Law, 2011), the successful practice of manipulating and managing social media still remains largely unknown to practitioners and scholars. In view of the increasing importance of social media and the absence of a review article on social media in the tourism and hospitality context, the primary research question of the current study is "What have tourism and hospitality researchers previously done with regard to the use of social media?" On the basis of this research question, this study reviews, analyzes, and synthesizes all tourism and hospitality studies on social media from both the consumers' and the suppliers' perspectives. This article first assesses the literature on social media applications in tourism and hospitality from the consumers' perspective by looking at their role in the three phases of the travelers' travel planning process suggested by Engel, Blackwell, and Miniard (1990; i.e., pre-trip, during-trip, and post-trip). The research findings would offer an overview of how tourism consumers perceive, utilize, and process the user-generated content on social media throughout the travel planning process. Thereafter, it addresses the topics from the suppliers' perspective by examining the applications of social media in five architectural functions suggested by Carson and Sharma (2001)—including promotion, product distribution, communication, management, and research. The findings would reveal the integration and development of social media in major functions of tourism businesses.

Theoretically and practically, it is acknowledged that this review study may not generate much contribution to both academia and industry as no new theoretical framework will be developed and the methodological approach in this study is not innovatively new. But since social media have been, and will continue to be, prevalent in the tourism and hospitality industry, a review and analysis of tourism and hospitality studies pertinent to social media in academic journals would benefit practitioners, scholars, and other interested readers by equipping them with a better understanding of the application and development of social media in the field. Prior studies have already coined the significance and implications of review studies, and it is our hope that this study will offer a comprehensive overview of findings and discussions in the tourism and hospitality literature on social media. Apart from offering an answer to the research question of "What have tourism and hospitality researchers previously done with regard to the use of social media?", providing an agenda for future research on social media in tourism and hospitality is another contribution of this study to the academia as well as the industry.

METHODOLOGY

In April 2012, all social media-related publications in tourism and hospitality were identified and gathered from Science Direct (http://www.sciencedirect.com), EBSCOHost (http://search.ebscohost.com), and Google Scholar (http://scholar.google.com.hk)—three of the largest and most popular online databases and search engines (Buhalis & Law, 2008). To achieve the objective of providing a comprehensive overview of findings and discussion in the tourism and hospitality literature on social media, the keywords of *social media*, and each of the terms *hotel*, *hospitality*, *travel* and *tourism* were used to search for social media-related articles published in academic journals since the above keywords are the study subject and contexts. Moreover, references cited in published articles were traced. Each identified article was carefully read through by two researchers to determine its inclusion for analysis. The decision to include an article to the analysis was primarily based on their

joint agreement of its direct relevance to the theme of the study. Alike other review studies in different research areas (e.g., Buhalis & Law, 2008; Jang & Park, 2011), this study only analyzed full-length articles published in refereed academic journals, mainly in the tourism and hospitality fields. Conference articles, book reviews, abstracts, editor prefaces, Internet columns, as well as conference reports were excluded from the study owing to their limited, if any, contributions to knowledge development (Jang & Park, 2011). The first selected article in this study was authored by Guillaume Thevenot in 2007 discussing the types, impacts, and implications of blogs on tourism business. At the end of the database search and the reading of the articles, a total of 44 published studies were determined to be relevant and were included in the analysis. Regarding the distribution of the analyzed literature by years, the numbers of social media-related studies published from 2007 to 2009 were two, three, and five, respectively. However, the numbers grew to 12 in 2010 and 22 in 2011. The statistics confirm that the attention on social media has been increasing among researchers and practitioners in the field.

The articles were then examined using content analysis. Prior to the analysis, a framework with three research streams from the consumers' perspective and another five research streams from the suppliers' perspective were first developed for classifying and analyzing the studies. Litvin, Goldsmith, and Pan (2008) noted that the travelers' travel planning process would be increasingly influenced by electronic word-of-mouth from social media. Hence, the use and determinants of social media in the three phases of the traveler's travel planning process—which are pre-trip, during-trip and post-trip—were highlighted as the consumer-related research streams. On the other hand, Carson and Sharma (2001) suggested that online technologies generally have five architectural functions—which are promotion, product distribution, communication, management, and research. Considering the breadth and depth of Carson and Sharma's (2001) framework on examining the application of online technologies, these five architectural

functions were employed as the supplier-related research streams.

To ensure the accuracy and objectivity of the article assignment, two authors independently reviewed all 44 articles included in the sample and assigned them to the eight research streams. As some studies discussed social media in several ways, one study might be assigned to more than one stream if the study focus was multifaceted. The classification results input by the two authors were then cross-compared to ensure consistency. It is possible that personal bias may exist during the assignment, but the consensus of two authors—both are experienced researchers in IT and tourism management—should minimize the probability of bias. Table 1 lists the description and the articles in each of the eight research streams. In the subsequent section, the key findings and discussions in the works of each research stream will be presented. In addition to reviewing the content of the extant studies, this study demonstrates the contributions of these works and provides managerial implications.

SOCIAL MEDIA APPLICATIONS FROM THE CONSUMERS' PERSPECTIVE

Role of Social Media in the Pre-Trip Phase of the Travelers' Travel Planning Process

Recent research from Google has shown that 84% of leisure travelers used the Internet as a planning resource (Torres, 2010). In examining the likelihood that online travelers come across social media content during a web search process, Xiang and Gretzel (2010) reported that social media constituted more than one-tenth of the search results. With the rising popularity of websites that contain content that is generated by travelers, a number of scholars coined the paramount importance of social media in the research phase of the travel planning process (Cox, Burgess, Sellitto, & Buultjens, 2009; Lo, McKercher, Lo, Cheung, & Law, 2011; Tussyadiah, Park, & Fesenmaier, 2011; Yoo & Gretzel, 2010). Huang, Basu, and Hsu (2010)

TABLE 1. Research Streams and Publications of Tourism and Hospitality Studies on Social Media

Research streams		Publications
Consumer	Role of social media in the pre-trip stage of the travelers' travel planning process *Studies relating to the use and impact of information on social media in the pre-trip stage (i.e., need recognition, information search) of the travelers' travel planning process*	Burgess, Sellitto, Cox, & Buultjens (2011); Cox, Burgess, Sellitto, & Buultjens (2009); Fotis, Buhalis, & Rossides (2011); Huang, Basu, & Hsu (2010); Lee (2011); Lo, McKercher, Lo, Cheung, & Law (2011); Papathanassis & Knolle (2011); Parra-López, Bulchand-Gidumal, Gutiérrez-Taño, & Díaz-Armas (2011); Sparks & Browning (2011); Xiang (2010); Xiang & Gretzel (2010, 2011)
Consumer	Role of social media in the during-trip stage of the travelers' travel planning process *Studies relating to the use and impact of information on social media in the during-trip stage (i.e., evaluation of alternatives, purchase decision) of the travelers' travel planning process*	Cox, Burgess, Sellitto, & Buultjens (2009); Fotis, Buhalis, & Rossides (2011); Lee (2011); Lee, Xiong, & Hu (2012); Sparks & Browning (2011); Tussyadiah, Park, & Fesenmaier (2011); Zehrer, Crotts, & Magnini (2011)
Consumer	Role of social media in the post-trip stage of the travelers' travel planning process *Studies relating to the use and impact of information on social media in the post-trip stage (i.e., post-purchase behavior) of the travelers' travel planning process*	Cox, Burgess, Sellitto, & Buultjens (2009); Fotis, Buhalis, & Rossides (2011); Huang, Basu, & Hsu (2010); Lee (2011); Parra-López, Bulchand-Gidumal, Gutiérrez-Taño, & Díaz-Armas (2011); Scott & Orlikowski (2012); Yoo & Gretzel (2011)
Supplier	Social media applications for promotion *Studies relating to suppliers' application of social media for reaching a global audience, disseminating promotional information, and strengthening company's marketing forces*	Akehurst (2009); Chan & Denizci Guillet (2011); Dippelreiter et al. (2008); Fuchs, Scholochov, & Höpken (2009); Huang (2011); Huang, Yung, & Yang (2011); Inversini & Cantoni (2011); Inversini, Cantoni, & Buhalis (2009); Kasavana, Nusair, & Teodosic (2010); Leung, Law, & Lee (2011); Lew (2008); Munar (2010); Pan, MacLaurin, & Crotts (2007); Schmallegger & Carson (2008); Wood (2009)
Supplier	Social media applications for product distribution *Studies relating to suppliers' application of social media for facilitating online bookings as well as distributing products and services*	Akehurst (2009); Chan & Denizci Guillet (2011); Fuchs, Scholochov, & Höpken (2009); Noone, McGuire, & Rohlfs (2011); Schmallegger & Carson (2008)
Supplier	Social media applications for communication *Studies relating to suppliers' application of social media for facilitating communication into and out between suppliers and customers or partners*	Akehurst (2009); Chan & Denizci Guillet (2011); Dippelreiter et al. (2008); Kasavana, Nusair, & Teodosic (2010); Kim & Hardin (2010); Pantelidis (2010); Schmallegger & Carson (2008); Sigala (2011); Thevenot (2007)
Supplier	Social media applications for management *Studies relating to suppliers' application of social media for managing training and professional development, financial management, internal communication, and other internal functions*	Akehurst (2009); Dippelreiter et al. (2008); Fuchs, Scholochov, & Höpken (2009); Huang (2011); Inversini & Cantoni (2011); Inversini, Cantoni, & Buhalis (2009); Isacsson & Gretzel (2011); Lee & Wicks (2010); Leung, Law, & Lee (2011); Li & Wang (2011); Liburd, Hjalager, & Christensen (2011); Pan, MacLaurin, & Crotts (2007); Pantelidis (2010); Schmallegger & Carson (2008); Sigala (2011); Stankov, Lazić, & Dragićević (2010); Stringam & Gerdes (2010)
Suppliers	Social media applications for research *Studies relating to suppliers' application of social media for maintaining internal knowledge, improving, and customizing products to suit customers' needs*	Akehurst (2009); Dippelreiter et al. (2008); Huang (2011); Huang, Yung, & Yang (2011); Isacsson & Gretzel (2011); Kim & Hardin (2010); Lee & Wicks (2010); Leung, Law, & Lee (2011); Li & Wang (2011); Liburd, Hjalager, & Christensen (2011); Pantelidis (2010); Pan, MacLaurin, & Crotts (2007); Schmallegger & Carson (2008); Sigala (2011); Stringam & Gerdes (2010)

Note. One study might be assigned to more than one research stream if the study focus was multifaceted.

even posited that obtaining travel information appeared to be the primary motivation driving the travelers' use of user-generated content (UGC) and social media.

It has long been argued that an important issue in tourism is the lack of direct experience with a tourism product, meaning that the quality and the perceived benefits of tourism and hospitality products can hardly be evaluated before the product is consumed (Schmallegger & Carson, 2008). Indeed, as tourism-related products and services are high-priced, high-involvement, and well-differentiated in nature, travelers generally collect and review various forms of travel information early in the travel decision-making process in order to minimize the risk of making wrong decisions (Jeng & Fesenmaier, 2002). Among all available information sources, word-of-mouth (WOM) has long been recognized as one of the important external information sources for travel planning because of its high perceived credibility (Murphy, Moscardo, & Benckendorff, 2007). Consumers often see themselves in the reviews of others and understand the products based on the perception of their "friends" or fellow consumers. Due to the lack of commercial self-interest in WOM recommendations, travelers consider WOM trustworthy and tend to be more influenced by this type of information than by commercial sources (Casaló, Flavián, & Guinalíu, 2011; Litvin et al., 2008). UGC, or so called electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM), is a new form of WOM that serves similar informational needs by offering non-commercial, detailed, and experiential information (Litvin et al., 2008). Traditional WOM and eWOM are similar in nature, yet Hart and Blackshaw (2006) asserted that traditional WOM is limited by the size of a social network. Yoo and Gretzel (2011) also suggested that eWOM could provide information with an access beyond the boundaries of one's immediate social circle. Through searching the content on social media, consumers cannot only collect travel information from friends and relatives who are within their social network, but also acquire more extensive information from Internet users around the world. Furthermore, Blackshaw and Nazzaro (2006) argued that UGC generated by social media

include a variety of new and emerging sources of online information. Thevenot (2007) supplemented that the travel experiences and perspectives of previous consumers could be shared with others through many different formats—including text, image, audio, and video. Given that the information available on social media consist of the collaborative knowledge of people from around the world in various formats, Schmallegger and Carson (2008), as well as Yoo and Gretzel (2011), noted that social media are more effective in equipping travelers with more comprehensive knowledge on a tourism product or destination than other information sources.

UGC on social media appears to be acting as an additional source of information which travelers consider as part of their information search process, and social media appear to be ubiquitous in online travel information search (Xiang & Gretzel, 2010). Yet, consumers' proposition to use social media or UGC on social media is still determined by several characteristics of UGC and several sociodemographic characteristics of the consumers. In a study on perception of meeting industry professionals and attendees toward the use of Twitter or Facebook in enhancing meeting experience, Lee (2011) found that the perceived usefulness is a strong antecedent of the attendees' acceptance of social media. In addition, age of meeting attendees and planners was found to be another important demographic factor determining the adoption of social media. The recency and variety of UGC on social media are also the key determinants affecting the usage of social media by travel consumers in the travel planning process (Salkhordeh, 2009).

Trustworthiness of travel-related UGC on social media is the most researched antecedent in prior studies. Even though UGC or eWOM on social media is virtually similar to traditional WOM, consumers often perceive eWOM as less trustworthy than WOM. The reason for this perception results from the difficulty of identifying the message source, since UGC is often created anonymously (Sparks & Browning, 2011; Yoo & Gretzel, 2010). Burgess, Sellitto, Cox, and Buultjens (2009) suggested that UGC is trustworthy since they are the real experience revealed by real people. However, sometimes,

this type of content can be unreliable because it may be posted by someone with a vested interest or commercial self-interest. As UGC has become an important information source for travelers, some studies attempted to examine what makes travelers trust UGC on social media. Yoo and Gretzel (2010) found that perceived expertise and trustworthiness of UGC creators were the significant predictors of trusts in travel-related UGC. Moreover, they found that travel frequency and the age of UGC creators are associated with the trust of travel-related UGC but that this relationship is not strong. Burgess, Sellitto, Cox, and Buultjens (2011) found that greater trust is placed in online travel communities when they are on a specific travel website than when they are on a more generic social networking site. Since trust is an important driver of travel-related UGC use and creation, Yoo and Gretzel (2010) concluded their study by recommending future researchers to examine the effect of different underlying dimensions and factors that could enhance the trustworthiness of UGC on social media sites.

Role of Social Media in the During-Trip Phase of the Travelers' Travel Planning Process

Tussyadiah and Fesenmaier (2009) suggested that UGC on social media had increasingly influenced destination awareness and subsequent decisions on destination selection. Indeed, UGC on social media is capable of providing unprecedentedly up-to-date and diversified formats of information to travel consumers. The role of social media in the stages of evaluating alternatives and deciding on a purchase are, however, rarely discussed in prior studies. Cox et al. (2009) found that UGC on social media was mainly used at the information search stage of travel planning. Based on a survey of 12,544 respondents among inbound tourists to Australia, Cox et al. (2009) reported that the percentages of respondents using UGC on social media in the evaluation of alternatives stage and the purchase decision stage were 22 and 15%, respectively. Some conflicting results were found in other market research and academic

research studies. A number of market research reports have shown that eWOM strongly influences purchasing decisions as well as consumer perceptions of quality. For instance, findings of a North American study conducted by iProspect and Jupiter Research found that approximately one-third of consumers were influenced by the information on social networking sites when making purchase decisions (iProspect, 2007). In another study conducted by comScore (2007), 84% of travelers reported that travel reviews had a significant influence on their purchase decisions.

A number of academic research studies have confirmed the impact and role of social media in travel-related decisions. McCarthy, Stock, and Verma (2010) explored the impact of social media on evolving customer preferences in the hotel industry. In another study conducted by Fotis, Buhalis, and Rossides (2011), the authors found that social media have changed the way online Internet users from Russia and the other former Soviet Union Republics make to their holiday plans. Sparks and Browning (2011) revealed that hotel customers' likeliness of booking is determined by valence, framing, and inclusion of ratings in online reviews. In the same vein, Tussyadiah et al. (2011) claimed that UGC on social media helps audiences gain information about a place by recognizing coherence in the story, and subsequently generated higher motivation as well as likeliness of choosing the destination. Tussyadiah et al. (2011) proposed that the narrative reasoning and narrative comprehension that readers possess have substantial impact on the usage of UGC on social media as well as on travelers' subsequent behavior. In general, the content shared on online communities and blogs are travel stories and experiences that are presented in a narrative format. Tussyadiah et al. (2011) posited that stories have the ability to encourage audiences to visualize the consumption of a product or service. Based on the results of a path analysis among 552 undergraduate students, Tussyadiah et al. (2011) found that travel consumers would develop purchase intention if they perceive the outcome of consumption to be similar to their past positive consumption experiences. Self-identification while reading the travel stories

would also lead to intention to consume the product.

Role of Social Media in the Post-Trip Phase of the Travelers' Travel Planning Process

Employing the AJAX (Asynchronous JavaScript and Extensible Markup Language) style programming, social media sites are no longer static but have become collaborative and interactive. All users can actively participate in the generation or enrichment of content (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Likewise, travelers today can actively engage in consuming, producing, and diffusing travel information through the Internet (Pantelidis, 2010; Sparks & Browning, 2011). Drawing on 346 Internet users from Russia and the former Soviet Union republics, Fotis et al. (2011) revealed that social media are predominantly used after holidays for experience sharing. As the last stage of the travel planning process, some scholars investigated the motives of travelers in the post-purchase evaluation and the creation of UGC on social media.

Previous research has found a number of reasons for posting travel-related UGC on social media. Pan, MacLaurin, and Crotts (2007) found that sharing life experience and social interaction are two major factors motivating bloggers to generate UGC. In order to understand the antecedents of the tourists' intention to use social media in organizing vacation trips, Parra-López, Bulchand-Gidumal, Gutiérrez-Taño, and Díaz-Armas (2011) found that travelers' participation and contribution to social media were attributed to their expected social benefits, hedonic benefits, and functional benefits. This result is in accordance with research by Yoo and Gretzel (2011) who argued that a traveler's personality is an important determinant in motivating or inhibiting the creation of travel-related UGC. Based on the responses from 2,671 members of a U.S.-based commercial online research panel, the authors reported that altruistic and enjoyment motives were important drivers for online travel content contributors. Moreover, neurotic travelers perceived greater barriers to generating UGC. This study contributes to the literature by confirming the role of personality traits in manipulating attitudes and behaviors of travel-related UGC use and creation.

SOCIAL MEDIA APPLICATIONS FROM THE SUPPLIERS' PERSPECTIVE

Social Media Applications in Promotion

Given the emergence and prevalence of social media among the consumers, it is no longer enough for businesses in tourism and hospitality to rely solely on traditional media for marketing. Defined as "a social and managerial process by which individuals and groups obtain what customers need and want through" (Kotler, Bowen, & Makens, 2006, p. 30), some recent studies have suggested that social media play an important role not only for consumers in travel information search but also as a tourism marketing tool (Chan & Denizci Guillet, 2011; Huang, 2011; Inversini, Cantoni, & Buhalis, 2009; Munar, 2010; Xiang & Gretzel, 2010).

Stepchenkova and Morrison (2006) suggested that marketing a country could be problematic without a clear understanding of how a tourist destination is perceived by travelers. Indeed, the reviews and stories written by consumers have the potential to enhance or detract from a firm's or destination's reputation (Sparks & Browning, 2011). Hence, a number of researchers posited that travel blogs reflect more genuine attitudes and opinions of tourists, and that this information may help destination management organizations identify unsuspected features (Akehurst, 2009; Leung, Law, & Lee, 2011; Pan et al., 2007). Pan et al. (2007) demonstrated the effectiveness and implications of analyzing blog entries in destination marketing. Applying the content analysis approach for 40 blog entries about Charleston, South Carolina, the authors identified that the major strengths of Charleston were its attractions, and that its major weaknesses included weather, infrastructure, and quality of food in fast-service restaurants. Leung et al. (2011) adopted a similar approach in analyzing the perceived image

of Hong Kong as reflected on the travel blog of Ctrip.com. In addition to providing a comprehensive overview on mainland Chinese visitors' perceptions of Hong Kong as a tourist destination, Leung et al.'s (2011) work demonstrated that monitoring travel blogs could be a cost-effective approach for destination marketers to understand travelers' experiences.

Apart from using this strategic tool to enhance the online image of businesses or destinations, the advent of social media offers new ways of impacting and serving consumers in the travel market (Pantelidis, 2010; Schmallegger & Carson, 2008). For instance, blogging is one of the ways of promotion which is often considered as an inexpensive marketing activity as compared to traditional advertising. Ellion (2007) suggested that company blogs or business-to-customer blogs are mainly there to create more lively and credible content on a website and to facilitate continuous contact with clients. In some European countries, blogs have been provided on official destination websites. Members from associated destination management organizations contribute to destination blogs and provide more credible insider information on destinations on various categories of interests—such as attractions, events, food and beverages, or entertainment (Schmollgruber, 2007). In addition to serving as an information source, blogs are capable of connecting companies and customers, developing a brand voice, and instilling trust with customers. Through blogging about topics that are relevant to readers, customers will trust the blogger as a source of reliable information. Once trust is built, more direct information on product and service offerings can be incorporated into the blogging strategy to build brand and product awareness and increase revenues. Considering the advantages of blogging, Price and Starkov (2006) found that some hotel companies have encouraged visitors to write entries or comments on their hotel blogs with rewards such as discounts and vouchers. However, this created an ethical dilemma regarding the credibility of the content on company blogs.

Many researchers noted blogging is effective in improving search engine rankings, increasing traffic to a company website, and subsequently in increasing online sales to the companies or destinations (Schmollgruber, 2007; Wyld, 2008). However, since social media are the polar opposite of traditional marketing media, the content on travel blogs should not be promotion oriented but clearly different from the content provided in conventional marketing information (Fernando, 2007; Schmallegger & Carson, 2008). Moreover, some scholars have suggested that blogs have to provide some added value to visitors, either in the form of interesting stories, unique insider information, and cost-saving opportunities to make them visit and contribute to the blog (Akehurst, 2009; Schmallegger & Carson, 2008).

Online communities or social networking sites (SNSs) are other social media applications frequently used by tourism practitioners. A social networking site is a platform that enables users to publicize personal information and to connect others with similar interests (Dippelreiter, Grün, Pöttler, Seidel, & Berger, 2008; Huang et al., 2010). Among all existing SNSs, Facebook is currently the largest cyberspace, accommodating 11.5% of the global population (Internet World Stats, 2012). Kasavana, Nusair, and Teodosic (2010) recognized the business potential of Facebook in assisting travel companies to pursue international electronic marketing. Through registering as a member and creating a page on the site, Facebook offers an alternative web-based tool for tourism enterprises to provide information, promote products and offerings, and respond to customer inquiries. Harnessing the content analysis approach on 67 Hong Kong hotel websites, Chan and Denizci Guillet (2011) found that hotels in Hong Kong have more extensive marketing efforts on Facebook than those on other social media applications.

Despite the tremendous potential of social media in electronic marketing, Chan and Denizci Guillet (2011) noted some companies were found to be lack of commitment to sustain social media marketing efforts. One possible explanation for this is the uncertainty about return on investment in social media marketing. Considering that social media are a relatively new marketing media, there is limited evidence on their financial returns. Hence, companies

may have doubt as to whether their investments in social media marketing could turn into business or how much resources they should invest in social media marketing. These questions may provide some clues or directions for future research as well.

Social Media Applications in Product Distribution

While an ultimate goal for employing social media is to convert website visitors to actual customers, the opportunities to use social media for direct product distribution may be more limited than for communication and marketing functions (Laws, 2001). One possible explanation for this phenomenon is that practitioners generally regard social media as a marketing and information dissemination platform, not a distribution channel (Noone et al., 2011). Still, there are some successful cases that have demonstrated the potential of social media in product distribution and revenue generation. For instance, the Omni San Diego demonstrated how active monitoring of social media could lead to revenue generation and product distribution. Their response to a wedding planner's tweet about a potential choice of hotel for a wedding won them business because they responded on Twitter but others did not (Lanz, Fischhof, & Lee, 2010). Distributing hotel room inventory on TripAdvisor is another strategy used by hotel companies to generate revenue through links to booking platforms. Krempl (2007) found that TripAdvisor can achieve a relatively high "click-through" rate of 20 to 30%.

Instead of directly distributing products or services to travel consumers, stimulating demand via social media may be another function for suppliers to enhance indirect distribution and to decrease distribution costs. Sharda and Ponnada (2008) argued that travel blogs could generate revenue through links to the company's e-commerce sites or direct booking platforms. Noone et al. (2011) agreed and suggested that providing a link on social media pages to a hotel website, or direct access to a hotel booking engine, will encourage fans and followers to book directly rather than through

third-party channels. Noone et al. (2011) also proposed that UGC on social media can be used by revenue managers to develop targeted push strategies. Through analyzing the comments on TripAdvisor or other online communities, suppliers can acquire some insights into what consumers like and dislike as well as what add-ons they are willing to pay for. After having a rich understanding of customers' characteristics and their behavioral patterns, suppliers may utilize these UGC to devise pricing strategies in order to enhance the value proposition and increase customer patronage. Even then, knowledge about and empirical evidence on applying social media in product distribution is still relatively limited.

Social Media Applications in Communication

As defined by Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) as well as Xiang and Gretzel (2010), social media are a group of Internet-based applications that exist on the Web 2.0 platform and that enable Internet users from all over the world to interact, communicate, and share ideas, thoughts, experiences, information, and relationships. In the era of social media, a shift in communications approach of companies has occurred, away from pushing things out toward enticing consumers to put things into the companies in order to create a fully interactive and mutually relationship (Li & Wang, 2011). Since customer engagement is critical to mutual communication via social media and because lack of interaction may affect the ultimate success of social media (Chan & Denizci Guillet, 2011), a number of researchers echoed that the emergence of social media presented an unprecedented opportunity for genuine interaction between tourism proprietors and consumers (Pantelidis, 2010; Schmallegger & Carson, 2008).

Though the most obvious form of blogs in tourism appear to be blogs from travelers who publish their personal travel stories and recommendations online, corporate blogs or business-to-customer blogs, like Marriott on the Move (http://www.blogs.marriott.com) and McDonald's Corporate Responsibility

Blog (http://www.csr.blogs.macdonalds.com), are also prevailing since many tourism companies would like to learn and improve by listening to their customers. In their study on the implications of blogs to destination management organizations, Schmallegger and Carson (2008) discussed how the multi-dimensional communication functions of corporate blogs assist in generating positive publicity and damage control. On the one hand, corporate blogs provide tourism and hospitality marketers with instant communication vehicles to convey the values of the brands, product updates, and other news to the mind of customers (Schmallegger & Carson, 2008). On the other hand, customers might provide positive and negative comments on the existing strategies and practices provided by companies or destinations. Huang et al. (2010) stressed that negative eWOM could have an overwhelming impact on a destination image. After the emergence of social media, suppliers could instantly offer an explanation and demonstrate how they are attempting to recover a service failure to dissatisfied customers if there is a problem on products, service, or operation.

In the business services field, as solving business problems often requires collaboration and communication among people, social media can help businesses communicate and gather customer input on future strategies and products (Jonassen, Howland, Moore, & Marra, 2003). My Starbucks (http://mystarbucksidea.force.com) is an example where Starbucks customers are able to suggest their ideas for new products or store features. By communicating with customers through different social media applications, the destinations or companies could gain insights relating to their competitive advantage and customer preferences (Huang, Yung, & Yang, 2011). This conversation may generate clues for marketers to customize new products or services to satisfy customers' needs. Besides benefiting the business-to-customer communication, social media play a useful role as internal communication, training, and knowledge management tools within a company. Previous research proposed that blogs, virtual technology, and social

networking sites are the platforms facilitating this kind of internal communication. Nacht (2007) suggested that an "intranet blog" can serve valuable training functions in businesses where staff members are in disparate locations. This tool may allow management staff to share experiences, judgments, and best practice examples and to coach employees on new skills. Lew (2007) also suggested that suppliers could use business-to-business blogs to share opinions and information on latest trends, technological developments, research findings, and marketing tips. Kim and Hardin (2010) noted that virtual world technology provides an inexpensive means for collaboration and communication. Through the instant messaging function in the virtual world, changes can be easily communicated among designers, IT employees, and business owners in virtual environments and can also be quickly evaluated as they are made to the virtual property. Kasavana et al. (2010) echoed this sentiment and proposed that social networking sites for coworkers could be a collaboration of organizational intelligence, optimization of employee talents, facilitation of communication, and shared insights related to work environmental situation.

Pantelidis' (2010) study demonstrated the importance of monitoring and managing electronic communications on social media. Not only can tourism suppliers achieve a better understanding of what consumers want and how they perceive their companies, customers' comments and opinions can also highlight areas of improvement and enable suppliers to protect their brands and images. However, suppliers may need to note the facilitation of communication with consumers and the provision of prompt responses. In their study on evaluating social media marketing of hotels in Hong Kong, Chan and Denizci Guillet (2011) reported that a majority of Hong Kong hotels failed to facilitate interactions and communications within the community. The researchers argued that a late response to concerns raised online is a critical issue to a company as it shows that a company has a low responsiveness to its customers, thereby contributing to a potential loss of business.

Social Media Applications in Management

Salkhordeh (2009) suggested there are two consequences to the use of social media. First, it can be a valuable tool to collect consumer feedback that is used to attract new customers and keep current consumers by creating strong and effective customer relationship that strengthens the loyalty of the brand. Second is the deterioration of consumers' faith and market value of the brand if they are not used properly. That is, the management of this substantial source of strategic information on social media is the key that determines the outcome of adopting social media to the business and revenues.

Litvin et al. (2008) looked at UGC on social media as a substantial source of strategic information which can be used for the development of a number of business strategies—including enhancing visitor satisfaction through product improvement, solving visitor problems, discovering visitors' experience, analyzing competitive strategies as well as monitoring image and reputation of a company. Harnessing the content analysis of all websites and tourist-generated content sites relating to destination management organizations (DMOs) in Europe, Munar (2010) reviewed and identified three major strategies that DMOs employed to encounter the challenges of UGC on social media. The three strategies were named as mimetic strategy, advertising strategy, and analytic strategy. Mimetic strategy represents that DMOs only copy the style and culture of social media to create their own business websites. It means they empower tourists to create, upload, and download content. This strategy is an easy and inexpensive way to embrace social media or Web 2.0 technology, and it allows DMOs to maintain control of the UGC displayed on their official websites. However, Munar (2010) argued that this strategy is conservative as the organization keeps the main locus of control of content presented on the organization websites.

Advertising strategy signifies DMOs' use of banners and other possibilities to publicize their official websites or destinations. In this case, DMOs solely perceive social media as advertising or promotional channels. While this strategy can increase the social media presence of the DMOs and their brands, the organizations do not learn and benefit from the pool of information provided by tourists owing to the absence of interaction between suppliers and consumers. Analytic strategy, the final strategy used by DMOs, has two different levels. The first level is that DMOs try to understand how UGC develops in relation to their brands. If negative contents are provided, DMOs will take action to minimize the damage or improve their marketing efforts. The second level is to transform massive amounts of UGC into strategic knowledge by using artificial intelligence. The limitation of this strategy is the significant financial investment needed as intensive use of information technology is involved in the implementation of this strategy. The author concluded her work by stating that the analytic strategy could bring new opportunities for improving the effectiveness of destination branding.

Fornell and Wernerfelt (1987) suggested that the main reason for attending to customer complaints is that it is cheaper to keep existing customers satisfied than to spend marketing dollars to find new customers. Desatnick (1988) noted it normally costs five times more to attract a new customer than to retain an existing customer. Based on the above strategic reasons, Stringam and Gerdes (2010) concluded their study by recommending tourism practitioners to encourage customers who are dissatisfied to seek redress so that the companies would have a chance to remedy those problems and retain customers' confidence as well as businesses. In the hotel context, the practice of listening to the customers and using that information to inform decision making is not new. The idea of reviewing UGC on social media is not to replace the traditional data sources, but rather to augment them with social media-based customer feedback. Lockwood (1994) posited that an analysis of guest comments could correct omissions and errors in service and product. Lewis and Pizam (1981) also suggested that a review of information in comment cards enables them to make management decisions, and would thereby result in improved service operations, increased profitability of the hotel, and increased loyalty of hotel guests. Harnessing the content analysis on 60,648 hotel review comments on Expedia,

Stringam and Gerdes (2010) found that travelers tended to discuss the hotel room bed and its components more frequently when assigning lower ratings than when assigning higher ratings. Moreover, the authors found that travelers primarily mentioned the bathroom in conjunction with negative comments. Given that the lack of cleanliness of a hotel was the most frequent concern of travelers (Stringam & Gerdes, 2010), these findings suggested that hotels with limited resources should focus their resources on their bathrooms and the overall cleanliness in order to achieve higher ratings from travelers.

Though there is a plethora of research on managing social media and UGC, only a limited number of studies have discussed the antecedents of strategy selection (Huang, 2011; Huang et al., 2011). Huang et al. (2011) offered a conceptual framework of travel agency practitioner-focused travel blog marketing channel strategies based on the results of a three-round Delphi survey among major Taiwan travel agencies. Huang (2011) proposed a similar framework and found that the selection of travel blog marketing channel strategies is positively related to internal motivations for investment and external environmental forces of the companies. Drawing on the results of a path analysis, the correlation coefficient values of the competitive intensity from industry incumbents, increasing customer relationships as well as strengthening promotion effectiveness are the highest among all internal and external motivators. That is, practitioners may need to pay particular attention to these three aspects while deciding their travel blog marketing channel strategies.

Social Media Applications in Research

UGC on social media is increasingly being considered as a new source of information for market research, as well as internal and external environmental analyses. Noone et al. (2011) suggested that reviewing UGC on social media may derive a better understanding of the characteristics of consumers who use specific social media applications. The information might be used to guide the development of target advertising and a promotional message for specific social media applications. Moreover, the information will help hotels better assess the revenue opportunity that various social media applications provide.

Kim and Hardin (2010) proposed that virtual world technologies can provide tourism and hospitality managers with social networking opportunities and servicescape experiences. To hoteliers, testing and evaluating different servicescape is relatively difficult in reality because of financial and resources constraints. However, the virtual world may provide hospitality practitioners with a low cost alternative means for trying out and evaluating servicescape offerings (Kim & Hardin, 2010). SecondLife is a virtual world which is highly recognized and frequently adopted by researchers and practitioners. Aloft, a hotel brand affiliated with Starwood Hotels and Resorts, successfully created the first three-dimension computer generated property in SecondLife. Prospective consumers can experience hotel facilitates in advance and provide feedback on design and other aspects. This cyberspace may also serve as a way of advertisement and corporate collaboration. While some people believe that virtual world users do not match normal target markets, an increasing number of users and greater involvement by international corporations led to a broader range of consumer demographic within virtual worlds (Hospitality Net, 2008).

Regarding tourism and hospitality education, Isacsson and Gretzel (2011) argued that successful edutainment is discernible by the fact that learning becomes fun and instructors educate an audience in a manner which is both engaging and amusing. Schott and Sutherland (2008) also argued that effective tourism education is a process of socially based, active co-construction of contextualized knowledge, with the aid of multimedia teaching strategies that foster active learning. As social media offer a set of web-based applications to provide students with opportunities to actively engage with information, Liburd, Hjalager, and Christensen (2011) noted that social media can play an important role in supporting dynamic, collaborative, interdisciplinary, and international learning experiences. In an experimental study with 38 students from Laurea University in Finland and Texas

A&M University in the United States, Isacsson and Gretzel (2011) found that Facebook is effective in allowing students to post a variety of materials and start discussions about them. However, Facebook might not be effective in establishing true collaboration among the students because of its high level of playfulness.

One key issue in working with social media in education is the mutual contribution by both teachers and students. Although a number of scholars proposed that social media could bring additional voices and views to a classroom, and that this might help stimulate students' engagement and understanding (Minocha, 2009; Smith, 2010), at the moment of this writing, there is still lack of empirical evidence to prove the effectiveness of integrating social media in enhancing learners' engagement. Liburd et al. (2011) have developed a virtual meeting space named "INNOTOUR" for educators to teach innovation, business development, creativity, experience design, sustainability, marketing, and others. Based on their personal observations and discussions with other users, Liburd et al. (2011) reported that it was not difficult to get students interested in INNOTOUR, but that enhancing students' motivation to work with INNOTOUR was relatively difficult. Careful moderation of academic activities is necessary to enhance students' interest in embracing social media in tourism learning. These studies revealed that successful integration of social media in tourism education requires the contribution and support by teachers and students to help one another to create a knowledge base. By cultivating an environment of creativity, mutual respect, and open knowledge construction, the authors recommended that students will have a better learning outcome in such a dynamic and interactive environment (Liburd et al., 2011).

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The continuous development of information and communication technologies (ICTs) during the last decade has had profound implications for the entire tourism industry (Buhalis & Law, 2008). Indeed, ICTs are imperative partners of the tourism system since they provide strategic tools to support the flow and organization of tourism information, which is the lifeblood of the tourism industry. Evolving from the static web to a new generation of travel-related web applications with new technologies to encourage and facilitate a higher level of social interaction among travelers, it has been acknowledged by both academics and practitioners that social media have a tremendous impact on both travelers and travel suppliers (Parra-López et al., 2011; Xiang & Gretzel, 2010). Based on the increasing number of social media-related research papers catalogued in academic journals, it is apparent that social media are becoming increasingly important in the online tourism domain. However, though increasing attention on social media in tourism and hospitality context has been drawn from scholars, the current research findings revealed that extant tourism and hospitality research on social media generally paid more attention to suppliers' application of social media. In addition, though suppliers' applications of social media on key architectural functions are well entrenched by previous scholars, uneven emphases on all key functions and research gaps can still be identified.

As shown in Table 1, supplier-related studies have concentrated closely on promotion, management, and research functions. Attention to the application of social media on product distribution was limited, however. Confronting the acute competition in the tourism and hospitality industries, the approach of combining traditional marketing channels with social media could help extend the online presence to a wider audience (Cho & Huh, 2010; Huang et al., 2011). It is surprising that the marketing potential of social media in enhancing brand awareness, customer engagement, as well as customer loyalty is widely discussed in extant studies (Chan & Denizci Guillet, 2011; Huang, 2011; Pantelidis, 2010). However, previous studies in this aspect generally focused on the way social media applications could be applied to promote tourist destinations or businesses. Developing the instruments and criteria to examine the effectiveness of social media marketing was largely absent among social media-related literature. Kotler et al. (2006) noted developing instruments, formulating benchmark, and

empirically evaluating the effectiveness of the marketing program are of necessity and significance to the ultimate success of a company. Moreover, as suggested in the previous section, industry practitioners have limited knowledge on the financial returns of their investment in social media marketing. Future research should fill this research void by proposing scientific methods or instruments with theoretical meaningfulness to assist industry practitioners measuring their social media marketing effectiveness.

Regarding its potential in business management and research, though prior studies confirmed that the advent of social media could provide strategic information for tourism companies in product improvement and product development, they overlooked the downside of the proliferation of social media which is the loss of control over the consumer evaluation process (Baker & Green, 2005). With the existence of various social media applications, consumers could easily distribute negative information or rumors through different platforms. While Eyefortravel (2007) reported that single negative comments about a company were very unlikely to cause any damage to the business or image, practitioners should consider negative comments on social media as an opportunity to enhance customer relationship management through responding, explaining, and engaging with their customers. If they are able to respond to negative comments promptly and constructively, they may dispel rumors and possibly revive customers' confidence toward the companies or destinations (Schmallegger & Carson, 2008). But though the importance of responding to customers' complaints was highlighted in extant social media-related studies, none has empirically examined the effect of different online responses and service recovery strategies toward consumers' online complaints. That is, practitioners in the field still do not have adequate knowledge to tackle consumers' complaints. The above problem also applies to the application of social media on product distribution. Table 1 shows that only 5 out of 44 studies have discussed suppliers' application of social media for distributing products and services. Though social media is defined as a group

of Internet-based applications enabling Internet users from all over the world to communicate and interact with each other, its potential in business generation and product distribution has been recognized in other disciplines (Jonassen et al., 2003). With the rising popularity and adoption of social media by tourism consumers, more knowledge on integrating social media in facilitating online shopping is desperately needed.

From the consumers' perspective, while the role and impact of social media on different stages of the travelers' travel planning process have been widely recognized by tourism and hospitality researchers, the use and impact of social media on the research phase of the travelers' travel planning process was overemphasized among consumer-centric studies. Recent statistics indicate that about 66% of online travelers browse online videos and audio clips; 40% read blogs, share photos, and take virtual tours; and 25% post responses to blog entries (Kasavana et al., 2010). Since UGC on social media has been regarded as a credible and important information source for travel planning, it is reasonable to find most of the previous social media-related studies focused on the research phase, particularly the information search process, of a travel planning process (e.g., Xiang & Gretzel, 2010).

Chatterjee (2001) believed that the UGC writers have nothing to lose during the sharing of personal experiences and comments. Thus, there is a higher level of perceived trustworthiness and reliability of UGC compared with traditional tourism information sources (Akehurst, 2009). While trustworthiness has been addressed as an important issue in online consumer behavior, travelers' perceived trustworthiness of social media is still unknown as conflicting results existed among social media-related studies (Cox et al., 2009: not trustworthy; Fotis et al., 2011: trustworthy). In other words, the idea of whether social media are more trustworthy than other information sources from consumers' point of view is still unclear. But since increasing numbers of travelers have accepted social media as a new channel to communicate, collaborate, and cooperate, it is believed that more credible travel information will be shared on social

media and the trustworthiness of information on social media will thus be positively recognized.

Although the role of social media at different stages of the travelers' travel planning process has been widely discussed in prior studies, the relative impact of each type of social media on travelers' purchase decision is not examined in extant research. Elliott (2011) reported that social media accounted for 22.5% of the time that Americans spend online and the corresponding percentage is expected to become higher in the coming years. Given that the popularity of social media with tourism consumers continues to grow, hospitality and tourism organizations can no longer ignore the rising popularity of social media nor their role in the travelers' travel planning process. It is imperative that researchers and practitioners continually explore the antecedents and impact of social media on the travelers' travel planning process.

CONCLUSIONS AND LIMITATIONS

Harnessing the content analysis approach on all hotel websites in Hong Kong, Leung et al. (2011) identified an increasing trend of adopting social media. More than half of the studied hotels, still, did not exploit the potential of this technology. Similarly, Stankov, Lazić, and Dragićević (2010) found that only 19 national tourism offices in the European Travel Commission have embraced social media. These results represent the limited and slow progress made by the industry in responding to the business opportunities brought on by social media. The online world is rapidly evolving and some companies may embrace new technologies due to the pressure to "be digital" but are not thinking about what it means to the business in a virtual environment. Instead of solely having a presence in the virtual marketplace, Salkhordeh (2009) argued that it is wise for managers of hotel and tourism companies to have the all-rounded knowledge of new technologies beforehand.

Through analyzing the content of 44 social media-related articles in academic journals, mainly in tourism and hospitality fields, from both the consumers' and the suppliers'

perspectives, this study contributes to the literature by distinctly answering the research question of "What have tourism and hospitality researchers done with regard to the use of social media?" Practically, this article will help industry practitioners and academic researchers in attaining a better understanding of how tourism consumers perceive, utilize, and process the information on social media. In brief, consumers generally used social media during the research phase of their travel planning process; and trustworthiness is a key antecedent in determining their decision on using information on social media. The article discussed the applications of social media in five key functions (i.e., promotion, product distribution, communication, management, and research). Drawing on the research findings, social media appear to be a strategic tool that plays an important role in tourism and hospitality management— particularly in promotion, business management, and research functions. Theoretically, the increasing significance and attention of social media in tourism and hospitality was coined in this study as the growing number of articles on the topic published in academic journals was found over the past few years. Moreover, this study contributes to the literature by providing an overview of findings and discussion in the tourism and hospitality literature on social media. Though social media in tourism and hospitality have been widely examined and discussed, social media research is still in its infancy. Hence, this study also contributes to the academia and industry by identifying some research voids in extant studies and providing an agenda for future research.

Findings and discussions of this study are useful to industry practitioners and academic researchers interested in the use of an emerging online technology-social media. Limitations in association with this study, however, are inevitable. A major limitation of this study is the inclusion of social media-related articles from academic journals. Books and research articles from conference proceedings, particularly the proceedings of the annual ENTER conferences, were not included. Future research should consider analyzing publications in all the above sources for more insights in the

subject. Another direction for future research is to analyze the progression and development of social media in tourism and hospitality. Following Jang and Park's (2011) methodological approach, it is suggested that future research can employ the quantitative content analysis approach to examine topical, methodological, sectoral, and authorship trends. This, in turn, can lead to a clearer picture of social media applications in the field.

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