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USING SOCIAL MEDIA AS A MARKETING TOOL FOR TRAVELLERS

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Abstract

This research assessed the influence of social media in the information search and decision-making processes of local leisure travelers working in the BPO (Business Process Outsourcing) industry in Metro Manila. It synthesized existing researches, concepts and theories to understand how social media applications influence local travelers. It also presented a snapshot of how consumers gather information and make decisions regarding their travel purchases in this rapidly increasing, commercialized field. Specifically, the paper described the socio-demographic profile of the travelers. It determined the social media sites most frequently used by travelers, the factors and elements that help in making their travel decisions, and the problems and issues they encountered. A profile comparison between social media and non-social media users was also made to determine if there was a significant difference between the two sets of respondents.

Keywords

Business Process Outsourcing, Social Media, Local Travelers, Leisure Travel, Tourism

1. Introduction

The use of social media continues to grow, with social media penetration set to hit three billion people worldwide by 2021 (Kapoor, 2018). It continues to evolve and play a larger role in day-to-day life (Kupsch, 2017), particularly to Filipinos. To illustrate, the Philippines again topped the world in terms of social media usage as the number of internet users in the country hit 67 million people, according to a new report by London, United Kingdom-based consultancy We Are Social (Camus, 2018). A study released by Universal McCann declared the Philippines as the “social networking capital of the world”. The Philippines is also regarded as the top photo uploader and web video viewer, while it ranks second among blog readers and video uploaders worldwide. Thus, the Philippines is considered as one of the top-ranked countries with high average hours spent in internet usage per day, according to the study of Global Webindex during the last quarter of 2014.

The study of social media in the context of the tourism industry is, likewise, evolving. This technological evolution offers opportunities and challenges to the Philippine tourism industry. However, there is not enough academic research on its impact to travel companies and, particularly, to the tourism industry even though the expansion of social media marketing is growing steadily. It would be interesting to investigate how social media has impacted tourism consumer behavior, in general, and the traveler consumer's decision-making process, in particular. The purpose of this paper was to better understand the extent of influence of social networking sites in the information search and decision-making processes of local leisure travelers working in BPOs in Metro Manila. This paper also aimed to synthesize existing researches, concepts and theories in order to understand how social media applications are being used by tourism authorities - both public and private entities, and to provide a bridge from past researches to possibly future success. The study presented a snapshot of the rapidly changing field on how consumers gather information and make decisions regarding their travel purchases.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

The main objective of this study was to assess the influence of social media in the information search and decision-making of local leisure travelers working in BPOs in Metro Manila, Philippines. More specifically, the study was designed to answer the following questions.

- What is the profile of local leisure travelers?

- What social media sites are the most frequently used by travelers?
- What factors influence travelers to utilize social media?
- What elements of social media influence the decisions made by travelers?
- What problems and issues do travelers encounter in using social media as a medium in choosing travel destinations?
- Comparison between social and non-social media users in terms of profile variables.
- What marketing program can be formulated to maximize the use of social media in promoting the local tourism industry?

1.2 Hypothesis

There is no significant difference between social media and non-social media users in terms of the profile of leisure travelers.

1.3 Significance of the Study

The information acquired from this study could benefit the following:

- Local tour operators – The formulated marketing program will be very useful to tour operators as they will have a better understanding of the market segment to address the market requirement/needs. By maximizing the use of social media, tour operators can save a big chunk of their marketing budget; thus, it will make their business more profitable.
- The Philippine tourism industry - If tour operators are able to implement properly the proposed marketing program, it will help increase the volume and frequency of local leisure travelers.
- Government agencies – Different government agencies may also use this research paper to gather significant information about our respondents and to get tips in using social media as a marketing tool in tourism promotion and advertisement.
- Local travelers – If the proposed marketing program is properly implemented, the leisure travelers' problems and perceived risks in using social media will be minimized.
- Future Researchers – The result of the study shall lead to other studies and will be a contribution in the augmentation of reference materials.

1.4 Framework

The Conceptual Paradigm in Fig. 1 will guide the researchers on how to obtain the necessary requirements and processes that the researchers need. Input includes the demographic profile of the respondents, followed by the process of identifying Social Media Networks, and other key factors and key elements as measuring tool influencing the information search and buying decision of travelers. Lastly the result of the study will be the basis for the development of effective marketing program for travel and tour operators.

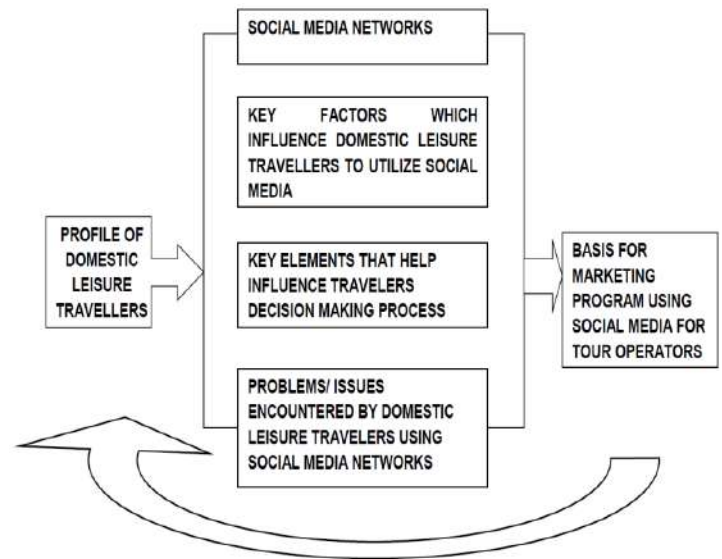


Figure 1: *Conceptual Paradigm on the Use of Social Media as a Marketing Tool for Travelers*

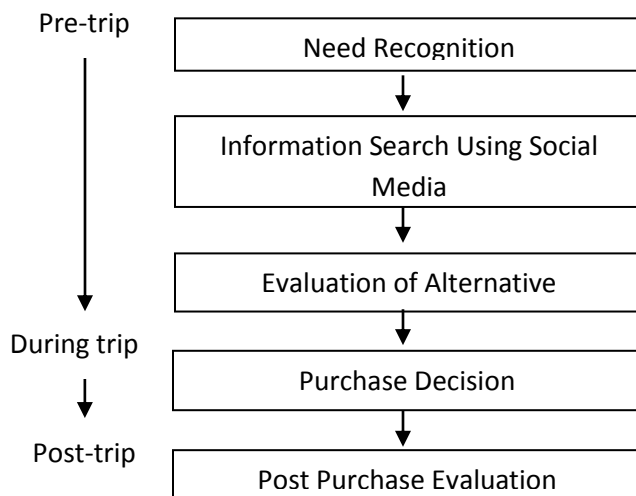


Figure 2: *Consumer Buying Process*

To better understand the study, the researchers adopted the Consumer Buying Process as grounded framework (See Fig.2.), where at the stage of information search, travelers rely more on social media rather than its traditional counterpart. They also considered key factors and elements, such as online testimonies, in evaluating alternatives. Thereby, leaving less room for poor choices once they reach the final decision.

2. Methodology

The descriptive research methodology was used for this study. A survey was administered to a selected sample from a specific population identified by the researchers. The descriptive method is a fact-finding method that explains the present condition and what is happening or going on at the time of the study. It is the most appropriate and accurate method for this study (Leary, 1995 cited in Abdi and Ali, 2013). Thus, the researcher chose this research methodology and designed a questionnaire survey instrument to determine the extent of influence that social media has on the decision-making process of domestic travelers.

2.1 Respondent of the Study, Population and Sample Size

The researchers surveyed 415 respondents from 20 BPO companies. Convenience sampling technique was used since the subjects were selected because of their accessibility and proximity. In addition, the relative cost and time required to carry out a convenience sample are small in comparison to probability sampling techniques.

2.2 Data Gathering Procedure

The researchers started this study by first reviewing past researches related to social media and tourism from both local and foreign sources. This was followed by conducting an interview with a small number of industry and academic experts to further expand their ideas during early literature review. The researchers also visited the library of the Department of Tourism to learn about the Philippine government's tourism programs and to gather quantitative data relevant to the study. After which, researchers developed a survey questionnaire which was the main instrument to gather information for this study. It was consisting of two parts, part one of the questionnaire was the respondents' demographic profile such as age, gender, civil status, educational attainment, occupation and income and part two are questions related to travel and is intended to further screen the respondent and to assess the influence of social media in terms of leisure travel. It was submitted, screened and approved by the research adviser before it was administered to the respondents. The experts validated the instrument and the researchers administering pilot test.

2.3 Treatment of Data

To understand the influence of social media in leisure travel, the results of survey questionnaire were organized and interpreted with the use of the following statistical techniques.

- Percentage

To determine the relationship between two magnitudes and the relationship of a part to its whole, researchers used percentage.

- Chi Square

To compare socio demographic profile of non-users and users of social media, chi square was used. It is a statistical test commonly used to compare observed data obtain according to a specific hypothesis

3. Result

Socio demographic profile of all BPO employees’ respondents.

Table 1-A: Socio demographic Profile of respondents

SOCIODEMOGRAPHIC VARIABLES		n	%
AGE	18-21	55	13.25%
	22-34	282	67.95%
	35-44	65	15.66%
	45-54	9	2.17%
	55-64	3	0.72%
	65 years old and above	1	0.24%
GENDER	Male	173	41.69%
	Female	242	58.31%
CIVIL STATUS	Single	279	71.91%
	Married	100	24.21%
	Widowed	2	0.48%
	Separated	14	3.15%
EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT	Post Graduate	37	8.87%
	College Graduate	325	77.94%
	High School Graduate	23	5.52%
	Vocational Course Graduate	17	4.08%
	Others	15	3.60%
MONTHLY INCOME	Less than Php 15,000.00	68	16.79%

	Php 15,001.00 -25,000.00	212	52.35%
	Php 25,001.00 – 35,000.00	79	19.51%
	Php 35,001.00 – 45,000.00	27	6.67%
	More than 45,000.00	19	4.69%
	Not Indicated	10	2.41%

Table 1-B: Socio demographic Profile of respondents

SOCIODEMOGRAPHIC VARIABLES		n	%
LEISURE TRAVEL MADE WITHIN THE PAST ONE YEAR	Yes	314	75.66%
	No	99	23.86%
	Did not specify	2	0.48
FREQUENCY OF LEISURE TRAVEL BY RESPONDENT WHO TRAVELLED WITHIN THE PAST YEAR	Seldom	2	0.64%
	Once a year	94	29.94%
	Twice a year	118	37.58%
	Thrice a year	55	17.52%
	Quarterly	26	8.28%
	8-10 times a year	1	0.32%
	Monthly	8	2.55%
	Twice per Month	1	0.32%
	Depends	7	2.24%
	Others did not specify	2	0.64%
DESTINATION OF LATEST LEISURE TRAVEL MADE DURING THE PAST YEAR	Local	206	65.81%
	International	45	14.38%
	Both	2	0.64%
	Did not specify	61	19.43%
RESPONDENT TRAVELLERS WHO CONDUCT PRE-SEARCH INFORMATION BEFORE LEISURE TRAVEL	Yes	266	85.53%
	No	45	14.47%
	Did not specify	2	0.64%

SOURCE OF INFORMATION ABOUT TRAVEL DESTINATION BY RESPONDENT TRAVELLERS	Friends/ Relatives	192	72.18%
	Travel agencies/airlines	85	31.95%
	TV/Radio/Newspaper	37	13.91%
	Social Media sites	205	77.07%
	Others: Internet	9	3.38%

- **Age:** Majority of the respondents belonged to the age group of 22 to 34, which represented more than two-thirds of our respondents (67.95%), followed by age group 35 to 44 (15.66%), and 18 to 21 (13.25%). Since the respondents were not pre-selected, representative distribution of the age distribution of all employees working in BPOs was evident. Eighty percent of the sample population were below 35 years old. This data is consistent with the findings of an earlier study that the average age of employees working in BPOs is 25. At this age, people tend to normally engage in activities that would relieve them of work-related stress.
- **Gender:** There were more female respondents (58.31%) than male (41.69%). This data is not surprising because according to the data posted by the National Statistic Office dated December 2012, more than half (54.9%) of the total workforce of BPOs are female. Thus, this validated the research's findings.
- **Civil Status:** Majority of the respondents were in the younger age groups, then it is more likely that most would also be single (71.91%). This group of individuals spend more freely on lifestyle products and services such as leisure travel as they are not bound by any responsibility as compared with married individuals.
- **Educational Attainment:** Finding indicates that majority of the respondents were college graduates (77.94%). This finding was an indicator that BPO employees are literate and able to communicate well.
- **Monthly Income:** More than 80% of the respondents earn more than Php 15,000.00 a month. In general, BPO employees are earning considerably more than other workers from the other sectors in the Philippines. According to the latest official figures provided by the

Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas (BSP) the average monthly compensation of a BPO employee in 2012 was about 1.6 times the minimum wage in the National Capital Region (NCR) and is among the country's top 10 highest paying industries according to the 2014 Annual Salary Report issued by Jobstreet.com (one of the largest human resources companies in the Philippines). In terms of spending habit, BPO employees have significantly higher monthly spending compared to the general population according to the Nielsen outcall report released last September 2015. This is not surprising since BPOs have more dispensable income compared to employees working in other industries.

- **Leisure travel made within the past year:** Three out of four respondents reported to have engaged in leisure travel during the past year. This result demonstrates the inclination of BPO employees to engage in leisurely travels.
- **Frequency of leisure travel:** Majority of respondents indicated that they travelled during the past year, almost all (>96%) travelled within the past year and 2 out of 3 indicated that they travelled at least twice a year. This demonstrates that BPO employees tend to travel, perhaps to cope with the stressful nature of their work.
- **Destination of latest leisure travel:** Two-thirds of the respondents travel locally for leisure. A number of respondents travel internationally. This trend may be higher than the general population and this may be due to the higher average income earned by BPO employees.
- **Respondents who conduct pre-search of information before leisure travel:** The result of the study shows that 8 out of 10 of the respondents conducted pre-search information before leisure travel. Considering that BPO employees are tech savvy and have access to the internet at their workplace, conducting pre-search information may be common. In addition, this behavior may help minimize the risks associated with travel. As a result, travellers can plan better because of data gathered thru this medium.
- **Sources of information about travel destination:** Finding shows that the main sources of information about travel destination are social media sites, and friends or relatives.

According to Stuart Jamie, Nielsen Philippines managing director, BPO employees are more accessible via internet because they are constantly on their mobile phones and staying online through their high connectivity and multiple connection points. This Nielsen findings support the research findings that social media is the main usage and source of information of these employees. As can be seen from Table 1.10, only 205 (out of the 415 total respondents) met the criteria set by the researchers, which is those who travelled within the past year and the use of social media sites as their source of information for travel.

Table 2: Social media sites frequently being used by respondent travellers

Social Media Sites	Very Often	Often	Undecided	Seldom	Never
Facebook (n=196)	112 (57.1%)	54 (27.6%)	4 (2.0%)	21 (10.7%)	5 (2.6%)
Twitter (n=159)	17 (10.7%)	28 (17.6%)	6 (3.8%)	32 (20.1%)	76 (47.8%)
Youtube (n=183)	53 (29.0%)	55 (30.1%)	6 (3.3%)	37 (20.2%)	32 (17.5%)
Blogs (n=182)	60 (33.0%)	70 (38.5%)	6 (3.3%)	26 (14.3%)	20 (11.0%)
Trip Advisor (n=181)	51 (28.2%)	69 (38.1%)	9 (5.0%)	28 (15.5%)	24 (13.3%)
Others (instagram, tumbler, travel sites, forums, google, internet) (n=15)	9	6			

Note: Data are not mutually exclusive

Table 2 reflects that the most frequently visited site among BPO leisure travellers is Facebook followed by blogs and trip advisor for their travels. This is not surprising because findings of the US Census Bureau in 2014 show that there are 34 million active Facebook users in the Philippines. In fact, Facebook is the top social media platform that Filipinos are using. Although Twitter has been reported as the 2nd most preferred social media platform of Filipinos, the result of this research shows that this is the least used site for BPO employees in terms of leisure travels. The limited features of Twitter may be a big contributing factor as to why this platform is not a preferred site for travel related information searches. According to the study by Weber Shandwick, Twitter accounts are primarily for serving news to followers but lack

feedback mechanism to encourage engagement.

Table 3: *Factors influencing the choice of social media by respondent travellers*

Factors influencing the choice of social media	n	%
Accessible and easy information search	171	83.4%
Reliability of information	67	32.7%
Real time connections and interactions	96	46.8%
Travel Inspiration/ Ideas	85	41.5%
Others	1	0.5%

Note: Data are not mutually exclusive

Table 3 shows that the main factor identified influencing the usage of social media is its accessibility and easy information search (83.4%). Other factors identified are real-time connection and interaction, travel inspiration or ideas, and reliability of information. With the nature of the job of BPO employees, they do not have the luxury of time to visit independent tour operators to inquire about their intended travel. Another contributing factor may be the cost associated with consulting travel agencies. Instead, these tech-savvy employees maximize the use of their gadgets to search for information about their travel plans.

Table 4: *Elements that influence their travel decisions as identified by respondent travellers*

Elements that influence travel Decisions	n	%
Posted photos/pictures and videos online	133	65.2%
Posted testimonies/shared experiences of friends, families and colleagues		

Suggestions	136	66.7%
Offered packages	92	45.1%
Travel costs	125	61.3%
Climate and distance to destination	54	26.5%
Enough activities for children (if travelling with family)	23	11.3%

Note: Data are not mutually exclusive

Table 4 indicates that the main elements that influence BPO travel decisions are testimonies or shared experiences of friends, families and colleagues' suggestions followed by posted photos/videos online as well as travel cost as evidence by >60% of responses. This result demonstrates that to minimize risks associated in travelling, BPO employees seek advice from someone they trust. Positive reinforcement may also be a factor when they see actual photos and footage of the travel site posted online. These photos and videos give the travellers a clearer picture of their intended destination and confirm what they read or heard about the intended travel destination site. Postings of testimonies and actual footage of the travel site would entice BPO employees more to travel to these locations. Travel cost, that would include direct and indirect costs related to travelling, is another important consideration. This would include transportation cost, cost of activities and other expenses associated with travelling. The travel packages being offered may have a moderate level of influence on BPO respondents. Some BPO employees are not into availing tour packages, rather, they prefer to travel on their own. Climate and distance to destination was rated low in terms of level of influence. This statistic shows that if the respondents are interested in travelling to a certain location, climate and distance does not have a strong influence in their decision. The least influential element identified are activities for children. This may be because majority of BPO employees are single.

Table 5: Problems/issues encountered with social media networks as a medium in choosing their leisure travel destination

Problems / Issues encountered	Very often n (%)	Often n (%)	Undecided n (%)	Seldom n (%)	Never n (%)
Filtered opinions of bloggers	25 (14.0%)	75 (41.9%)	33 (18.4%)	29 (16.2%)	16 (8.9%)
Accessibility					
Insufficiency of network sites	8 (5.2%)	50 (32.7%)	29 (19.0%)	53 (34.6%)	12 (7.8%)
Insufficiency of network providers	9 (5.9%)	43 (28.3%)	31 (20.4%)	56 (36.8%)	12 (7.8%)
Poor service of network providers	10 (6.8%)	43 (29.3%)	35 (23.8%)	44 (29.9%)	14 (9.5%)
Deceiving / Misleading Advertisement					
Information is not accurate	15 (9.7%)	50 (32.3%)	22 (14.2%)	57 (36.8%)	10 (6.4%)
Information is insufficient	15 (9.7%)	55 (35.5%)	22 (14.2%)	51 (32.9%)	11 (7.1%)
Information is not updated	24 (15.0%)	59 (36.9%)	21 (13.1%)	46 (28.8%)	9 (5.6%)
Poor tour package	14 (9.7%)	38 (26.2%)	32 (22.1%)	44 (30.3%)	16 (11.0%)
Extra charges	27 (15.9%)	47 (27.6%)	25 (14.7%)	37 (21.8%)	33 (19.4%)
Illegal travel agencies	21(12.7%)	35 (21.2%)	31 (18.8%)	26 (15.8%)	51(30.9%)

Note: Data are not mutually exclusive

Table 5 shows the problems/issues that BPO employees encountered with social media networks as a medium in choosing their leisure travel destination include filtered opinions of bloggers, accessibility, deceiving/misleading advertisement, extra charges and illegal travel agencies. Among the problems cited, filtered opinion of bloggers (55.9%) is often noted or cited followed by information is not updated (51.9%), information is insufficient (45.2%), Inaccurate information (42%) and insufficiency of network sites (37.7%). Thus, people become social

media followers and fans of an organization because they trust that the content provided is both reliable and relevant to them (Wolfe, 2016).

Table 6-A: Comparison between social and non-social media users

Particulars	Use Social Media Sites (n=205)	Do not use Social Media Sites (n=107)	P-Value (Chi-Square Value) Critical Value ≤ 0.05
	n (%)	n (%)	
Age			0.003 (15.5457)
18 – 21	15 (46.88%)	17 (53.12%)	Social media site users significantly differ with non-users in terms of age, particularly for the age group 22-34, 7 out of 10 use social media sites, while the reverse is true for the 45-54 age group.
22 – 34	160 (71.4%)	64 (28.6%)	
35 – 44	27 (56.25%)	21 (43.75%)	
45 – 54	2 (28.6%)	5 (72.4%)	
55 – 64	2 (100.0%)	0 (0.0%)	
Gender			0.075 (3.1674)
Male	75 (60.5%)	49 (39.5%)	Social media site users do not significantly differ with non-users in terms of gender.
Female	132 (70.2%)	56 (29.8%)	
Civil Status			0.126 (6.3695)
Single	160 (68.7%)	73 (31.3%)	Social media site users do not significantly differ with non-users in terms of civil status, although it can be seen than more than 2/3 of those who are single use social media
Married	41 (59.4%)	28 (40.6%)	
Widowed	0 (0%)	1 (100%)	
Separated	4 (44.4%)	5 (55.6%)	
Complicated	1 (100%)	0 (0%)	

Note: Data are not mutually exclusive.

Table 6-B: Comparison between social and non-social media users

Particulars	Use Social Media Sites (n=205)	Do not use Social Media Sites (n=107)	P-Value (Chi-Square Value) Critical Value ≤ 0.05
	n (%)	n (%)	
Highest Educational Attainment			
Post-Graduate	17 (60.7%)	11 (39.3%)	0.728 (4.3664) Social media site users do not significantly differ with non-users in terms of highest educational attainment.
College Graduate	167 (65.2%)	89 (34.8%)	
College Undergraduate	8 (72.7%)	3 (27.3%)	
High School Graduate	7 (70.0%)	3 (30.0%)	
Vocational Course	7 (87.5%)	1 (12.5%)	
Occupation			
CSR	86 (61.9%)	53 (38.1%)	0.079 (11.3227) Social media site users do not significantly differ with non-users in terms of occupation.
Programmers	5 (35.7%)	9 (64.3%)	
Technical Support	21 (63.6%)	12 (36.4%)	
Manager	17 (68.0%)	8 (32.0%)	
Coding Technician	12 (70.6%)	5 (29.4%)	
Data Analyst	17 (70.8%)	7 (29.2%)	
Others	47 (78.3%)	13 (21.7%)	
Monthly Income (Php)			
< 15,000	21 (61.8%)	13 (38.2%)	0.293 (4.9403) Social media site users do not significantly differ with non-users in terms of monthly income.
15,000.01 – 25,000.00	121 (69.9%)	52 (30.1%)	
25,000.01 – 35,000.00	31 (54.4%)	26 (45.6%)	
35,000.01 – 45,000.00	16 (64.0%)	9 (36.0%)	
> 45,000.00	11 (68.8%)	5 (31.2%)	

Note: Data are not mutually exclusive.

Table 6 shows that social media users and non-users significantly differ in terms of age, in favor of the younger sector of the respondents, 34 years old and below. Obviously, this group is highly exposed to the social media, aside from the technical skills and expertise in the use of the same. Other demographic characteristics such as gender, civil status, occupation, monthly income and highest educational attainment are not an important indicator in terms social media usage.

Marketing Program to Maximize the Use of Social Media as Major Source of Pre-Travel Information.

Objectives: To reach out the younger generation

Person / Office Responsible: DOT, Tour Operator

Time Frame: All year round

Target Market: Individuals age less than 34 years old, single, literate and with average to high disposable income

Activitis and Strategies:

- This market segment is so accustomed to information technology and relies heavily on social media as a source of travel information. Hence, tour operators and the Department of Tourism (DOT) should consider intensifying their efforts of marketing tourism through this medium.
- Since this market segment finds pictures, videos, and contents posted in social media engaging, tour operators and DOT should encourage travellers to post their own pictures and videos and to tell their own unforgettable travel experiences, since posted testimonies, shared experiences of friends, families and colleagues' suggestions are the main elements that influence travellers decision.
- Tour operators should offer activities that would address the thrill-seeking characteristics of this group, which tend to travel with people of their age.
- Celebrity tourists who are considered as influencers may be tapped by tour operators and DOT since this young age market usually look up to them.
- Tour operators and DOT should also make use of blogs since this travellers are also into reading blogs for their travel-related activities. Bloggers, who write and share their personal experiences during their trips are one of the best sources of first-hand experience for interested travellers.

- Since this group loves to explore, DOT should feature unexplored beautiful places in the Philippines as well as interesting activities to try in different locations in the Philippines. It should be posted on its' social media accounts to encourage this group to travel to these places.
- These group are concerned about accessibility of information, real-time connections and interactions. With this in mind, tour operators social media account should be always updated, complete and at the same time queries and concerns should be quickly responded. Tour operators and DOT should avoid using misleading advertisement that would frustrate these travellers.

Objectives: To reach out the older population

Person / Office Responsible: DOT, Tour Operator

Time Frame: All year round

Target Market: By demographic characteristic, this market segment ranges from 35 years old and above, married and with children, literate and with disposable income to spend for travelling

Activitis and Strategies:

- As people age, the frequency of travel also decreases. Regardless, the older population is also another market segment that can be tapped in tourism. This segment is travelling locally for leisure with family and are more likely to do so for relaxation and some recreation. This segment is also characterized by being more price sensitive than the younger population. In order to tap this segment, there is a need to offer affordable tour packages for the entire family. Package should include recreational activities like sightseeing, biking, boating for the entire family.
- To reach this market, tour operators and DOT can make use of traditional marketing tools such as TV and print ads. This population is also using social media to reach this segment although the frequency of usage of this segment is not as much as compared with the younger age group.
- More importantly, this segment can be reached thru positive word of mouth advertisement from their close friends and relatives. By having loyalty programs or promotion (such as giving discounts or earning points for every traveller referred), this perk will encourage customers to advertise the company even more. The company can also

run a contest using social media account more so with Facebook. Travellers can win a free trip if they tag or post pictures of their trip featuring the services of the tour operator with favourable comment about the company. This will therefore, make the tour operator more visible to this segment. To make the business more visible thru social media, tour operators can also advertise in high tourist traffic areas such as websites or Facebook pages for travellers.

- This segment are less risk-takers when compared to the young population; so tour operators need to be responsive to queries and concerns of customers in their social media accounts. Tour operators must have someone in-charge of handling all concerns of this segment.

Objectives: Increase frequency of travel during lean seasons

Person / Office Responsible: DOT, Tour Operator

Time Frame: Rainy / Wet season

Activitis and Strategies:

- Offer attractive packages during lean seasons, like very affordable group tour packages inclusive of accommodation and activities. Offer more indoor activity packages during rainy season like affordable overnight stay in a 5-star hotel inclusive of activities like spa, musical and theatre play and museum tour.
- Offer tours situated near the business district during weekdays so travellers have the time to avail of these tours.

4. Discussion

4.1 Conclusion

Research findings show that majority of respondents from BPO (80%), are younger than 35 years of age. There are more female respondents and majority are single (72%). Majority are at least college graduates (86%). It is a fact that BPO employees have higher wages than other sectors and this study confirms that by demonstrating that 82% of respondents are earning more than Php 15,000 monthly. The research also proved that they are engaged in leisure travel (3 out of 4 respondents) and are travelling at least twice a year (2 out 3 respondents). Majority of the respondents (>96%) also travelled locally in the past year. 8 out of 10 respondents conduct pre-

search information before travel and social media is the main source of their travel information. These findings only prove that people who are more engaged in travelling are those who are young, single and with average to high disposable income. These are the individuals who love to have fun, adventure and to experience new explorations.

Findings prove that social media is the main source of information of leisure travellers and Facebook is the most frequently visited social media site. Facebook, among other social media sites have features which are suited to information search for leisure travel. It allows interactions between traveler and business representatives and among other travellers, therefore minimizing the risks associated with travelling. Blog is the second main source of information for travellers. Like Facebook, blogs also provide important information that travellers are looking for.

This research found out that accessibility and easy information search (83.4%) is the main factor that influence the choice of social media. Since majority of Filipinos own a social media account and internet connection is a lot better than before, social media becomes more accessible to travellers. Real time connections and interactions (46.8%) is another important factor influencing the choice of social media. Facebook has this kind of feature making it the most preferred social media site of travellers.

Posted testimonies/shared experiences of friends, families and colleagues' suggestions (66.7%) is the primary element that influence travel decision. Posted photos/pictures and videos online is the next important element that travellers are considering. In this regard, tour operators and DOT should be able to effectively incorporate this element in their social media accounts to encourage more travellers to travel and avail of their products and services.

There are also some problems that social media users encountered in search for information using social media. The main problems that most of these travellers commonly encountered were filtered opinion of bloggers and insufficient and outdated information. Tour operators as well as DOH should be able to address these problems to encourage more travellers to use social media in their travel information search. Lastly, researchers proved that social media users and non-users do not significantly differ in their demographic profile except for the age variable which is a significant indicator of social media usage. This study concludes that leisure travellers are mostly young people who possess the technical skills in the use of social media which acts as the tool for major sources of pre-travel information and have the financial

resources that would allow them to engage in such activity. While the study was limited to a particular sector of the young (employees in the BPO), other sectors of the population are potential beneficiaries as well.

4.2 Limitations and Recommendations

This research paper was limited only to the study of social media as a marketing tool in tourism. Social media is one of the newest trends in advertisement and shows potential because of the growing number of social media users. Respondents of this research study were limited to employees working in BPOs (Business Process Outsourcing) in Metro Manila, Philippines and travel was limited to domestic travels for leisure purposes only. Researchers purposely selected this profile of respondents because it represents an attractive segment in the tourism industry. Majority of these respondents have high dispensable income and their work is also very stressful because of the nature of their work as well as the non-physiologic work schedule. According to Nielsen, the unique lifestyle and habits of business process outsourcing (BPO) employees are influencing retail and consumer consumption. They alter their lifestyle to fit the demands of their job, they also change their purchase and consumption habits. According to Stuart Jamieson, managing director of Nielsen Philippines (Lopez, 2013) “Being well paid than most Filipinos, BPO employees are formidable members of the growing middle class population of the country. The spending habits of BPO employees reflect an affluence that is more than the general population, spurring consumer spending,”

The researchers are proposing the following marketing program for local tourism promotion. The proposed marketing program is focused on using the different social media sites, more so with Facebook, as a marketing tool to entice the young market to travel locally for leisure. Facebook is the best medium to use because as the data of this study shows, it is evident that travellers use various social media sites, specifically Facebook, as the primary source of information for their leisure travels. Researchers also presented some recommendations to tap another potential market segment; those that are in the older age groups, married, have average to high disposable income and with interest in travelling. This market segment can also be tapped using social media and traditional marketing tools. Furthermore, this study encourages travellers to travel during lean season when travel rates are at their lowest.

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