EXPLORING THE TRUSTWORTHY INFORMATION SOURCE FOR CHINESE TOURISTS TRAVELLING TO PACIFIC SIDS

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Abstract - Tourism features in the national development plans of most Pacific Small Island Developing States (SIDS). While Chinese tourists' spending in the world has reached a new high, Pacific SIDS destinations are trying to find ways to attract this lucrative market. With the rapid development of information and communication technology, travelers look for information from various platforms. Through four focus group interviews and a 3-month web content analysis, this study looked at what information channels are trusted by the Chinese tourists and the differences of review contents generated by users or the management of destination marketing organization.

Keywords - Chinese Tourists, Information Source, ICT, Pacific SIDS, User Generated Content

I. INTRODUCTION

Tourism plays an important role in the national development plans of many Pacific Small Island Developing States (SIDS) (Hampton & Jeyacheya, 2013). Tourism has also become the major source of SIDS' economy because of their infrequent characteristics including limited resources, remoteness, susceptibility to natural disasters, vulnerability to external shocks, excessive dependence on international trade, and fragile environments (United Nation, 2015). In addition, the unique geographical situation and local culture of SIDSattracts a lot of visitors to travel to SIDS (UNWTO, 2014). According to the World Tourism Organization's (UNWTO) latest report (UNWTO, 2015b), the Chinese outbound traveller spending in the world reached a new high. Meanwhile, the People Republic of China (China) has increasing presence in the Pacific SIDS in trade and investment. Therefore, Pacific SIDS destinations are trying to search out ways to attract this lucrative market. However, data deficiencies make it difficult to understand the needs of Chinese market's that led to the hesitation in terms of travelling to Pacific SIDS.

A qualitative approach was adopted to explore the information channels thatare considered as trustworthy travel information sources by Chinese tourists andtoinvestigate the differences of the contents that were generated by users and the management of destination marketing organizations (DMO). This research aimsto find out what travel information Chinese tourists are really looking for and make recommendation to DMOs and tour operators.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Tourism in SIDS

Tourism presents conspicuously in the National Development Plans of many SIDS in the Pacific (Hampton & Jeyacheya, 2013).As Pratt(2015) indicated that tourism provides a lot of opportunities to the development of SIDS. For example, the local governments will gain much extra foreign exchange and tax revenues, local residents' job opportunities and income will be increased, and the basic infrastructure will also be improved that will also benefit the local people. There are 14 countries in the Pacific SIDS including Cook Island, Fiji, Marshall Island, YAP, Nauru, Niue, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Island, Timor-Leste, Tonga, Tuvalu, and Vanuatu and they possess with some special vulnerabilities and characteristics which include limited resources, remoteness, susceptibility to natural disasters, vulnerability to external shocks, excessive dependence on international trade, and fragile environments (United Nation, 2015). However, it is difficult for the Pacific SIDS to define whether they have reached their target market of tourism because of data deficiencies (UNWTO, 2014).

The expenditure of Chinese outbound traveller in the world reached US$261 billion in 2016 which has more than tripled (US$73 billion) in 2011(Matthew, 2017). In order to attract such a large market of Chinese spenders, many countries offered visa-free (Fiji, Cook Islands, Niue, Samoa, Tonga, and Tuvalu) and visa-on-arrival (Palau and Vanuatu) especially to Chinese tourists (South Pacific Tourism Organization, 2015).

With the advanced information and communication technologies (ICT) and proliferation of the social media, people's consumption behaviours and consumption patterns have been increasingly changed to depend on using the social travel sites and services which provide user-generated travel reviews for travellers planning trips (Fotis et al., 2012). The purpose of consumer using user-generated content (UGC) is to help them in managing perceived risk and making decision for their trip and consumer also indicate that UGC is more trustworthy and easy to use (O'Connor, 2008).Tourism organization also rely on UGC to encourage the knowledge sharing of

tourism products and enhance destination reliability as well as authenticity (María, 2011). In addition, UGC can influence potential customer's choice (O'Connor, 2008), shape tourism demand (María, 2011) and increase sales of consumer products (Ye, Law, Gu & Chen, 2011). UGC focuses on lifestyle, entertainment of local people and negative stimulation, while management-generated content (MGC) focuses on activities, culture, traditions, art and attractions (Lim &Weaver, 2012) Besides, Chiu &Silverman(2012) indicated that MGC is sometimes artificial in either positive contents for themselves or negative comments for their competitors.

II. METHODOLOGY

A qualitative approach was adopted in this study. Four focus group interviews including 45 individuals were conducted between November 2016 and January 2017 to capture the interactions between the interviewees, conjecture their feelings and stimulate their opinions. Through the case of the Cook Islands, a Web content analysis was also conducted from October to December 2017 to obtain a brief overview of SIDS cases' presence in China's major online travel providers and social media.A total of 100 posts and 307 reviews were analysed.(See Table 1) All the information collected was analysed by Nvivo 11 with thematic analysis.

Platform	Posts	Reviews
Official tourism blog	46	
Official Sina Weibo	12	
Mafengwo		26
QYER		24
Sina Weibo	42	
TripAdvisor		257
Total	**100**	**307**

Table 1. Posts and reviews analysed in each platform

III. RESULTS

The results of focus group show that Chinese tourists frequently search travel information through internet and prefer to obtain some travel tips and advices from some travel related social Websites, such as Mafengwo, QYER, Trip Advisor and Sina Weibo which are very popular in China. Respondents also reflected that they choose these websites because they believe that the travels experiences, tips and suggestions shared in these website by other tourists who have exactly been to the destinations are more trustworthy and useful. Meanwhile, only a few respondents stated that they will visit destination official website to get the information for their travel preparation.

According to the results of the Web content analysis, UGC provide more detailed travel information to tourists than MGC, such as local price, unique local attractions, activities and festivals, recommended local tours and travel time, local public security, local currency and more. However, the most important difference between UGC and MGC is that there are unhappy experiences shared by some tourists in UGC that other tourists can avoid troubles from it.

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