AN ASSESSMENT OF THE ROLES OF THE SOCIAL NETWORK IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE TOURISM INDUSTRY IN BANGLADESH

Mohammad Badruddoza Talukder[1], Md Lokman Bhuiyan[2]
[1]Assistant Professor & Head of the Department, Department of Tourism & Hospitality Management, Daffodil Institute of Information Technology, National University.
[2]Consultant & Research Coordinator, Bangladesh Environmental Research Foundation

ABSTRACT

Tourism is the fastest expanding business & service oriented industry in the world. The importance of social media is growing in the kingdom of the tourism business industry in Bangladesh. More and more researchers are undertaking studies in the areas of impact of social media on the tourism industry. The media is one of the most important tools for the tourism business. Social media is also can play a significant role in tourism advertising and helps the tourism service providers in focusing tourists and public. The aim of this study was to contribute in the tourism industry development in Bangladesh by providing factual information to relevant stakeholders and to understand the future role of social media in the years to come on the tourism so that it benefits the tourism industry and the tourists globally. To investigate the reasons behind tourism industry development, a survey conducted on 2000 respondents that include different professionals & non professionals. Most of the researchers have focused on the positive side of Social media contribution to develop tourism industry in Bangladesh

Keywords:
Social Media, Social Network, Tourism, Respondent, Internet

INTRODUCTION

Bangladesh is a most beautiful country by naturally in the world. Bangladesh needs more diversification for its sustainable economic growth. According to the Bangladesh Tourism Board, some of major industries are shipbuilding, pharmaceuticals, light engineering, leather products, handicrafts, ceramics, cement, fertilizer, food processing, electronics and agriculture. In addition, tourism is very potential and promising industry in Bangladesh. Bangladesh has the prospect and capability to attract more local and overseas tourist and earn lot of foreign currency from tourism industry. Social network can play a very important role to discover and develop the tourism business in Bangladesh. There is no doubt that tourism is an useful development device and it is demanding for attention in area of tourism sector.

The main attraction of this country is its natural beauty. It has the longest and largest sea-beach of the world, the Cox's Bazar sea-beach. There are three world

heritage sites in Bangladesh: The Sundarbans, the Shat-gombuj mosque and the ruins of the Buddhist Bihar at Paharpur. Bangladesh has incredible prospective for becoming one of an global tourist spaces country. Social media or network refers to the means of exchanges among people in which they share something, create, or swap over information, ideas and own experiences in effective communities and networks. In today's times social media can play a very key role in almost every segment. Platforms such as facebook, Messenger, twitter, Instagram, whatsapp, etc. have become important both from personal and business perspective. Social network has made an enormous impact on the tourism industry. In the arena of internet, online, social media can use as a advertising weapon to promote tourist attraction, and provide information about transport and hotel. In the vision 2021, for developing Bangladesh tourism sector, the government highlights on digital Bangladesh that is regular with the use of social media or network and alter net delivery channel. All the stakeholders can use social media to gather and collect several information and supporting tourism businesses to prospective travelers. In many instances, social media users can be key categories of tourist sector. Social network is also appropriate using channel to emphasize the tourism industry to attract local and worldwide tourists and turn them to visit popular tourist destination in Bangladesh.

a. Literature Review

The extensive use of web applications and the escalating number of social media or network applications during the last decade have given a new figure in tourism destination advertising. Social media is measured to be an imperative tactic in order to market tourism products (Zeng & Gerritsen, 2014). In the tourism industry social media has changed the scenery of promotion. Today most of the travelers determine their travel plans based on social media shares and reviews, thus making online customer service a crucial part of building a positive brand reputation. There is a sufficient significant research gap in determining the impact of social network on tourism industry expansion in Bangladesh. Some research depicts the problems and diagnosis of tourism sector in Bangladesh.

Other focuses on the impact and consequence of tourism industry in the economy of Bangladesh. However, realizing the importance of the tourism sector, government has reformed national tourism policy. The objectives of this policy are to increase employment and economic development, and maintain environmental preservation and sustainability (Siraj et al., 2009). The major purpose of national tourism policy is to build up Eco-tourism through management of natural resources, support safety of the society, increase local people participation, preserve cultural values, and share benefits with the local communities. Government of Bangladesh has enacted an act named "Protected Areas of Tourism and Special Tourism Zone" to rescue this industry (Kabir et al., 2012).

Bangladesh attracts less international tourists and generates small revenue from the tourism industry (Pennington and Thomsen, 2010). Tourism is one of the cost-effective sectors for Bangladesh (Elena et al., 2012). Rahman (2016) mentioned that it is necessary for the tourism companies to cope-up with the technology based customers. Social branding strategy is becoming popular in the hospitality and

tourism industry. Social branding increases the opportunities for the industry to bond with their customers and employees in a quick and efficient way. Musa (2013) defined that tourism marketing is an incorporated effort to make happy tourists by ensuring the best achievable existing services for them.

Sultana (2016) mentioned that tourism marketing is a tool to transform potential tourists into actual tourists. It is the safest way to generate demand and expand tourism businesses. Bangladesh has enormous potentiality in tourists because of natural and expected destination .Yet government has not given adequate attention to progress the industry. Social media plays important role since government has improved ICT industry. According to the World Travel and Tourism Council (2015), the total contribution of Travel & Tourism to GDP was BDT 627.9bn (4.1% of GDP) in 2014 . It is predict to rise by 6.5% pa to BDT 1252.8bn (4.4% of GDP)by 2025. The total contribution of Travel and Tourism to employment was 1,984,000 jobs in 2014 (3.6% of total employment). This is forecast to rise by 2.1%pa to support 2,492,000 jobs (3.6% of total employment) by 2025.

This research reveals the deliberate magnitude of social media in the progress of tourism industry in Bangladesh. In the time of information technology, social media has expand the chance for promotion in several business including tourism and hospitality management. In Bangladesh, social media can also participate essential role to attract tourists to take a trip more destination. Social media can discover this market for global tourist if exploit correctly. (Roque & Raposo, 2016) mentioned that social media is assuming an inexorably vital part as information sources for travelers. Xiang and Gretzel, 2010 affirms the developing impact of social network in the online tourism district. By tremendous using of social network over the last few years in Bangladesh, In the framework of tourist places promotion, social media is a rising area of study and the demand for research and activities in the field of social network and tourism sector will be continue and increased. According to daily Star report -Over the last twenty years, the tourism arena of Bangladesh has not made enough development. The lack of infrastructure and promotional activities through media on online are one of the main reasons behind it.

Compared to the past few years, government and private companies recently have invested finance for the expansion of tourism division. Statistics prove that it is the economically beneficial outcome arena. Tourist or visitor those who are planning to visit firstly can be informed about the destinations or visit places popularized & information among tourists mostly by the network. In present world, communication network such as internet, social media, online has become more proficient and. Media can encourage tourism by sharing and exchanging experiences properly and media can also demolish a purpose through negative exposure. It is also shown that there is a strong relationship between visible level of power from social media and changes made in holiday plans prior to final decisions. Moreover, it is revealed that user-generated content is perceived to be more trustworthy when compared to official tourism websites, travel agents and mass media advertising (Fortis, Buhalis & Rossides, 2012). Similarly, Zeng & Gerritsen (2014) also did a study to review and analyse the research publications of other authors focusing on social media in tourism. Through a comprehensive literature review, they found out that the research on social media in tourism is still in its infancy. In study of (Hvass & Munar, 2012),

the Information Communications Technologies (ICT) plays a major role in tourism, travel and hospitality industry. Integration of ICT in tourism has become essential for the success of tourism. With the combination of ICT facilitates, human being can entrance the tourism product's information from anyplace at any time. Review of Literature has shown that the social media plays a significant role in Tourism.

b. Area of Study
This survey includes respondents from all over Bangladesh (Dhaka, Chottogram, Cox's Bazar, Saint Martin, Sylhet, Sundarban, Kuakata and others).

c. Significance of the Study
The research results can be used for academic and professional purposes. Also public & private tourism authorities, travel agencies, advertising firms, tourism businesses, scholars and academia can use research result for future study and industry benefits.

METHODS
This is an empirical study and the research is exploratory and qualitative. The primary informations are collected through questionnaire and survey. This survey included open & close ended and multiple choice questions.

Primary data have been collected through questionnaire survey in 2016 which is applied in the field of different location in Bangladesh. Secondary data have been collected from literature review, research publications and World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION
Bangladesh has fabulous possible for becoming an international tourist hotspot. The study includes questions to investigate what induces people to travel. Research reveals that the travel decisions of people are influenced by the comments and reviews of friends, family, professional's relatives, and colleagues on the social media. Social media is one of the leading sources to find required travel information about destination, accommodation, restaurant, and transportation. The inspiration of travelling arises from the experience shared by people on the social media. People easily find information about tourist attraction, hotel, transport and artifacts on the social media that can assist them select destination before making their travel plan. Tourism is an important driver of economic growth. Besides this, People have an opportunity to exchange culture. Tourism can earn huge amount of foreign currency. Tourism can support the Balance of Payment (BOP) of a country and can also create employment.

1. Social Media in Travel
Many tourists find their favorite places and travel information from different Social media platforms, such as, Google, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram and Private Blogs. Google, Facebook and Instagram are the leading stimulus among travelers to make travel decision.

Social media is now a competitive marketing weapon and strategic decision making instrument for many business firms. Here, survey questions are analyzed to depict

the meaning of social media on tourism industry development in Bangladesh. For a clear and enhanced understanding of the topic of this research paper, the results are organized into many subsections each corresponding to one question of the interview. Such as-preference for traveling sites, reasons of travelling, media used to search travel information, The frequency of travel, number of trips in a year, duration of each trip, preferred transport for traveling and barriers in travelling.

2. Prefeence of Traveling Sites

Most respondents about 58% like natural places to visit and 27% respondents like artificial sites to visit. The following figure-1 shows percentage distribution with regard to their preference of sites to visit.
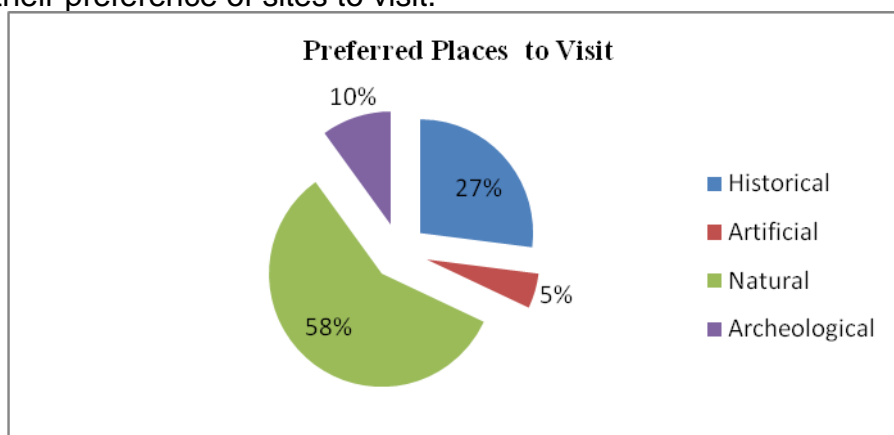

Fig- 1: Preferred Places of Visit

3. Media Using to Search Travel Information:

In this research, most respondents said that they are using social media and websites to find out information about destination, transportation, security, cost, accommodation and other facilities because they share travel experience and reviews in social media, website, newspaper& magazine and with friends& family. Social media and website mostly using 40% and 38% respectively to search travel information. The below chart shows distribution of percentage for media using to find out travel information.
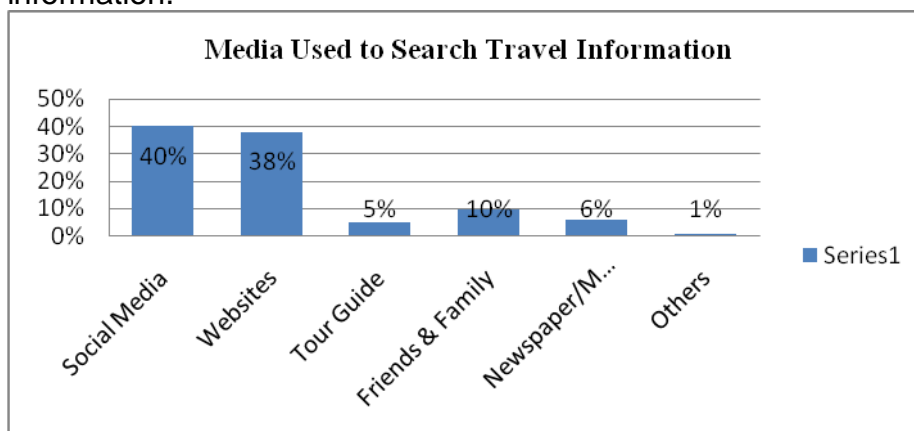

Fig- 2: Media Used to Search Travel Information

4. Impact of Social Media on Tourism:

Regarding the impact of social media on tourism industry development in Bangladesh, 91% respondents said that social media has significant impact on tourism industry development in Bangladesh. People said that their travel experiences are influences by the comments, posts, and reviews of other people on the social media. The following chart shows the percentage of respondents of significant impact of social media on the tourism industry expansion in Bangladesh.
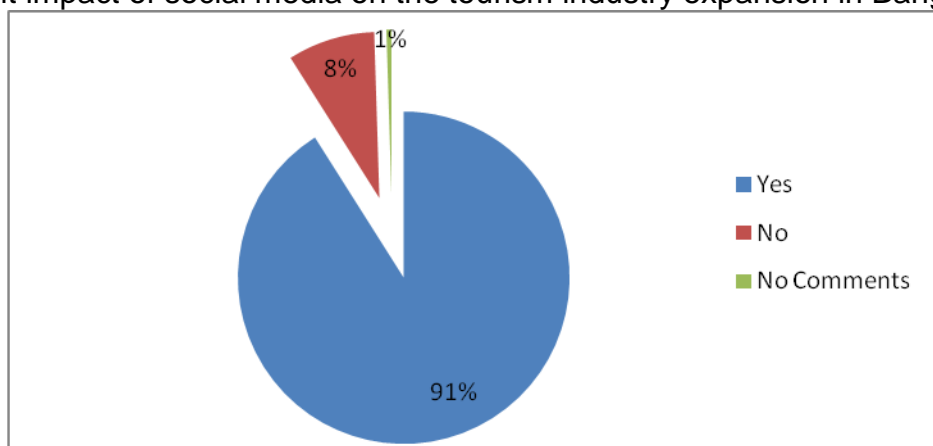

Fig- 3: Impact of Social Media on Tourism Development

5. Government Initiative to Explore Tourism Industry on the Social Media:
In this survey, 95.47% respondents think that Govt. should focus on social media to explore tourism industry nationally and internationally.

6. The Purposes for Traveling:
In general, people likes to travel for deferent purpose like enjoy, academic, business, family, research & conference and others. Majority (41%) of the respondents mentioned that they like traveling for pleasure and fun. 18% for academic purpose, 5% for family reasons, 30% for business purpose and 6% for other reasons. The following chart shows the percentage allocation of respondents regarding the reasons of traveling.
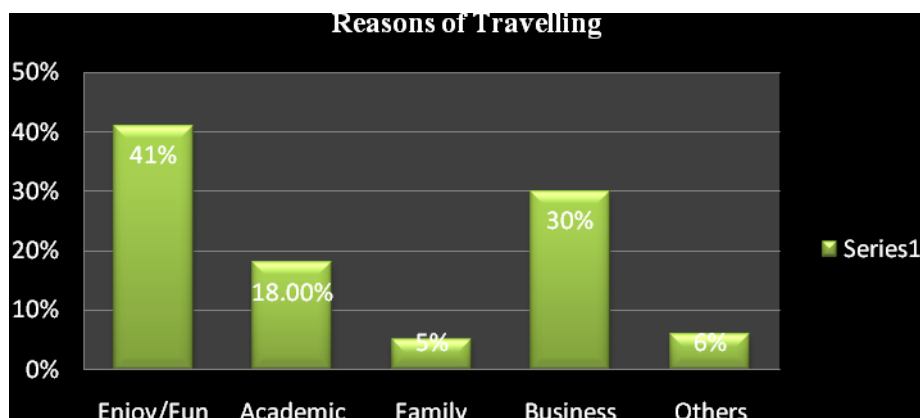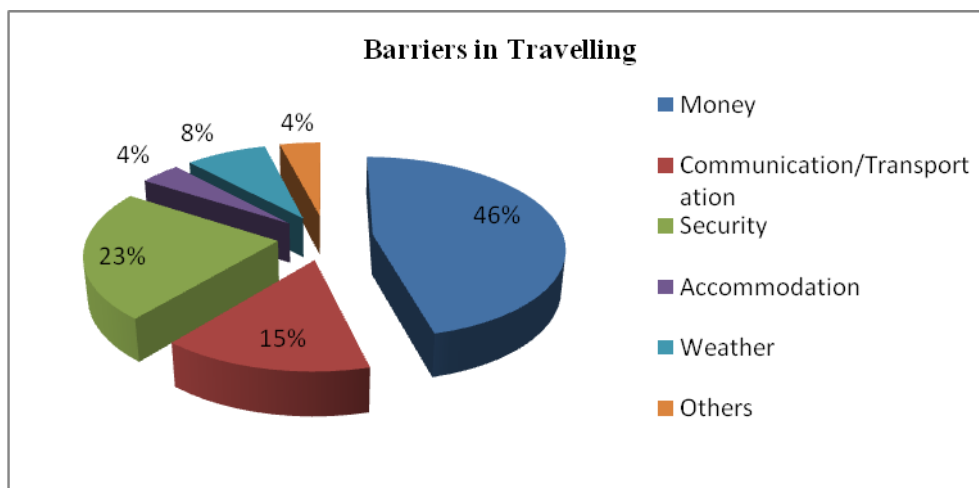

Fig- 4: Reasons of Travelling

7. Limitation in Traveling:

There are some barriers in traveling. In this research, 46% respondents said that money is key barrier in traveling. Security and local transportation are very importance for travelers. The below picture shows the percentage of traveling barriers.

Fig- 5: Major Limitation in Travelling

8. Recommendations

This research reveals that social media is a competitive marketing weapon and a strategic decision making device for many tourism enterprises. The strategic importance of social media is not only from marketing perspective but also from the connectivity among travelers to get access in travel information. The following recommendation can be drawn from the study.

8.1.Discover and Improve the Latent Tourist Places: Bangladesh is almost full of natural attraction and there are lots of archeological and historical sites that can attract local national and global tourists. Government and private tourism business enterprises should focus on developing new tourist spots and improving existing sites to attract more traveler.

8.2. Utilize of Information Technology in Promotional actions: The recent modify and growth in Information and Communication Technology (ICT) has a innovative impact on the tourism sector. For focusing the tourism industry of any country, social network can play the principal role throughout assist and sharing information. Authority of Bangladesh tourism must think the proper use of ICT for the encouragement of tourism industry. It is significance mentioning here Bangladesh Parjatan Corporation has its own web page and it should be well-made, tourist-friendly and enclose all the required information.

8.3. Improving Supporting Industry: For improvement of tourism industry, government should more initiate to improve other industries related to tourism business. This research reveals that transportation, safety at the location facilities in

restaurant, hotel and resort and dining systems are the major concern among tourists. Tourism sectors need to be improved to attract national and global tourists.

8.4. Allocation Promotional finance: Bangladesh is not in a position to fight with the world's peak visitor generating countries, but it has the capacity to compete with the member countries of SAARC or a few other small countries in this province except India. To fight with these countries, it needs to perform research on tourism endorsement. But the allocation of funds for this purpose is not enough. Bangladesh should raise the allocation of funds very much for tourism development. In addition, the concerned authority should implement a strategy to efficient utilize the fund for tourism promotion and development.

 8.5. Application of Social Network as a Promotional Tool: Businesses always has involved in tourism industry should focus on social media such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, You-Tube, LinkedIn and other search engines to promote tourist attractions, discover new sites, and provide travel information. People using social network or media platform to search travel destination, share pictures, comments, reviews, and experiences on social media that allow tourism enterprises to take necessary initiatives to improve their services.

CONCLUSION
The use of social media is increasing significantly over last decades. Now, all the industry including tourism are using social media as a competitive marketing weapon. Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, Google, LinkedIn are the leading social media where the users find travel information. All tourism information should be under one sunshade and able to be seen to potential customers in the country and abroad. Government can use social network to collect information about travelers and improve the industry for future competitiveness. Bangladesh has potentiality to become one of the tourist places countries for local and international tourists in the world if the government takes suitable initiatives to improve this industry. As a result, the contribution of tourism industry will increase significantly to the economy of Bangladesh.

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