USER GENERATED CONTENT IN TOURISM MARKETING

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ABSTRACT

This article is based on the idea that user generated content is of fundamental importance in tourism and travel industry to understand the role of consumer generated messages. This paper also describes interpersonal influences mean for user generated content and also word of mouth (WOM) which reflect cost effective for tourism and travel industry but as well as the real crisis lead by the customer and discusses the new technological and ethical considerations facing tourism and travel industry.

Keywords: WOMM, Marketing, User Generated Content, Tourism, Blog

INTRODUCTION

Today, competition is increasing and the costs of attracting new customers are rising. For the markets such as tourism and travel, it might cost five times as much to attract new customers as to keep the actual ones happy (Kotler, et al., 2006: 401). Unfortunately the classical marketing emphasises on presale and sales activities rather than on postsales (aftersales) activities thus, in a changing and a challenging world, creates new generation, new media and new consumer behaviours, also new risks and crises.

The fact that tourism seems vulnerable to all kinds of risks and also crises because of its sensitivity. Tourism and travel industry is intangible so as it is more than a product and it depends on images reflected by the mass communication channels as well as the interpersonal relations. Tourism images are built through many channels; governmental authorities, local municipalities, operators, tourism agents, travel consultants, news media, entertainment media, but it is the customer who has the strongest impact – rather than a huge marketing campaign. In his book "Crisis Manager: Facing risk and responsibility" Lerbinger describes the tourism is living in the "era of crisis" (Lerbinger, 1997). Faulkner notes an increasing

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number of disasters and crises which affect the tourism industry, ranging from natural to human influenced incidents (Faulkner, 2000: 135). Other study on tourism summarizes the risk such as follows:

"Businesses are vulnerable to accidents, to natural disasters, to strikes, to food poisonings and to terrorism. Entire countries, regions and tourist resorts can be overrun by such unfortunate events" (Gonzales – Herrero and Pratt, 1988: 84).

Lee and Harrald state that ''natural disasters can disrupt the supply and distribution chains for even the best prepared business… service businesses are increasingly vulnerable to electrical, communication and other critical infrastructure failures'' (Lee and Harrald, 1999: 184).

However our discussion in this paper is related within neither to political crises nor to natural disasters, but reflected technological improvement and new marketing issues introduced as user generated content.

With the improvements of internet technologies, the number of travelers who seek travel and tourism information on the internet has increased. Advancements of the e-commerce and online transactions between the tourism operators and customers enable new forms of communication and gather the whole communication elements by empowering customers. Studies in USA show that while the number of Americans using the internet have increased and they who plan and book trips or vacations online continues to rise rapidly. According to the "2005 annual report" of Travel Industry Association of America (TIA), the annual report, "Travelers' Use of the Internet", which was issued on 2005, shows that the internet continues to grow as a dominant channel for both reaching and transacting today's travel consumers (http://www.tia.org/express/dmail_Dec05.html).

Survey results indicate a distinct majority of online travelers (78% or 79 million Americans) turned to the internet for travel or destination information in 2005, much higher than the 65% of online travelers in 2004. The majority of travelers said that they consulted the internet for travel and destination information (U.S Travel Industry in the Eye of the Storm, 2006: 1). The survey also found that 82% of travelers who plan their trips online now also book reservations online (http://www.tia.org/express/dmail_Dec05.html).

According to the Jupiter Research (U.S Travel Industry in the Eye of the Storm, 2006: 8) , travel is the top category in terms of spending for all products purchased online, and it is still growing. Also that supplier websites continue to represent the majority of online travel sales accounting for 56 percent of online travel revenue in 2005. e-commerce and online marketing are changing both the way how they do business and how consumers perceive the products and services our industry has to offer.

With the rapid rise in internet usage for travel booking or planning, it becomes imperative for travel executives to understand how to market online. Online travel is an increasingly popular tool that responds primarily to the consumer's desire to have more control over the products and services purchased. Rapid advancements in online business especially in internet, companies gathers information about individuals, customers, intermediaries and their partners. With the help of internet, electronic marketing is rapidly transforming the way tourism and travel organizations while conducting their business (Kotler, et al., 2006: 685). Internet offers also great advantages for the companies.

Today 3 out of 10 travel sales are booked online and they generate around $65 billion (Katz, 2004: 479). The internet has become an utmost medium for tourism and travel companies. They can not only buy and sell, but also communicate worldwide via internet. Internet intruduces some advantages into the tourism and travel market. For instance, it works non-stop, is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week also covers worldwide and huge capacity of colorful photo images, capability of information transactions across millions of people round the world hold the internet at the top of the media in the changing world.

Especially in the tourism and travel industry, the companies can use their customers as their own employees. By making their bookings, purchaising the services online, printing the vouchers and getting the information, photographs about the place, hotel, restaurant and gaining access to world; this system offers advantages at low cost advantage to the companies.

Today, more companies recognise the importance of retaining their customers. Research done on the effect of securing customer loyalty through services, is reported in a paper called "Zero Defections: Quality Comes to Services" by Reichheld and Sasser.

According to a report, by reducing customer defections by only 5 percent, companies may increase 100 percent in their profitability (Reichheld and Sasser, 1990: 105 – 111).

Due to technological advances, consumer behaviours change immediately. Before the digital age, improvement in printing press and introduction of copy machine would become a revolution in the world of communication. Digital technology; internet and world wide web in a short time replaced the old technological innovations. Digital technology particularly internet, has been described as an enabler of a global marketplace, characterised by "equal access to information about products, prices and distribution" (Pires et al., 2006: 937). The world wide web has reduced the time related to communication, making transaction, working, learning, getting information and shopping. The web also has changed the consumer behaviour which is essential to marketing: The consumer has become more involved to generate information and share their opinions with each other.

1. USER GENERATED CONTENT

User generated media content is not a new idea. In fact, the interaction of professional media producers and their readers, listeners and viewers has a longstanding interactions (Schweiger, Quiring, 2006: 2). Letters to the editor, letters to the radio producers and television program producers (Gans, 1977: 86; McGuire & Leroy, 1977: 79) , radio show callings (Bierig, Dimmick, 1979: 92 - 93) and also the musical request calls for the music shows can be given as examples of user generated contents (UGC). Schweiger and Quiring determine that the creation of media content with the help of users gained importance with the advent of the new media (Schweiger, Quiring: 3). In fact, the tern UGC was named for determining user contributions to the new media environment. Digital age and new media brought some changes for media users and producers to have interactions in the process of the creation of public content (Walter von., Quiring, 2004). As outlined the details above, UGC can be the result of process including the combined forces of media users and providers with the aim to reach the public. It can also be defined as UGC is an intereactive process (Schweiger, Quiring: 4). "User generated content is connected to the concept of interactivity" says Schweiger and Quiring (Ibid: 17).

UGC is sometimes called as consumer generated media (CGM). Consumer generated media describes a variety of new sources of online information which are created, initiated,

circulated and used by consumers intent on educating each other about products, brands, services, personalities and issues (Blackshaw, Nazzaro, 2006: 2). Such new sources of online information, web sites contain user generated contents help to create perfect forums which also motivate and enhance the customers with positive power. Perfect example is an international web encyclopedia "wikipedia.org". It's an entirely user generated content which today contains a total of on 2,060,126 articles in the English version (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Special:Statistics) . According to Wikipedia's site statistics, this number excludes redirects, discussion pages, image description pages, user profile pages, templates, help pages, portals, articles without links to other articles, and pages for Wikipedia administration. Including these, they're claiming that they contain **10,647,458** pages. (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Special:Statistics, this information has been retrieved on 23.10.2007). This is what Wikipedia also defines as of: User Generated Content (UGC), also known as Consumer Generated Media (CGM) or User Created Content, refers to various kinds of media content which are produced by the end users (as opposed to traditional media producers such as professional writers, publishers, journalists, licensed broadcasters and production companies).

Lev Grossman from Time Magazine claims that User Generated Content is a tool for bringing together the small contributions of millions of people and making them matter. He also adds that it's about the many wresting power from the few and helping one another for nothing and how that will not only change the world, but also change the way the world changes (Grossman, 2006:1).

User Generated Content can be referred to any number of online media such as e-mailing, newsgroups, instant text messages (Msn - Messenger), complaint sites, search sites, consumer ratings web site for forums, public internet discussion boards, blogs (web logs – web diaries), moblogs (web sites where users post photographs, movies or any images), vlogs / consumer created videos), social networking sites (such as facebook and myspace) and also private web sites. Today's technological evolutions enabled consumers to download, vote, upload, poll, forward and share their information, emotion, ideas, comments, likes and dislikes on the internet.

Here, UGC exists as a medium which allows consumers to communicate directly with other consumers.

Websites: With rapid improvements in information technology world wide web has triggered the internet, and it has led to transform it from an ordinary tool into a revolutionary technology. Since its conception in 1990 and the first prototype in 1991, the web has come into general use at an amazing pace (Geest, 2001:9). Today, the number of web users worldwide has exceeded 1 billion and it's expected to approach 2 billion by 2008 (Marketing Fact Book, 2003: 23-24).

Internet provides limitless opportunities for many industries. For sure, tourism and travel industry finds the web power to convey their communication and marketing messages and communicate to their customers. Organizations are becoming aware that they have to give their visitors good reasons to visit their site and good reasons to return to it. (Geest:9).

RSS: Really Simple Syndication (RSS) is an increasing popular way for the people to collect updated information from various web sites. RSS or "Really Simple Syndication" which means web content can be more easily distributed to multiple destinations. This technology allows marketers to deliver updated content and information from their websitse to it's customers who subscribe to receive these feeds. It is a way to bypass spam filters that limit e-mail distribution and ensure the customers who want to receive updated information get it. Recipients establish their preferences for content when they subscribe to the feeds. Some examples of RSS feeds may include low prices for particular airline routes that a traveler uses often or updates on the construction of a golf course that a traveler is eager to visit (U.S Travel Industry in the Eye of the Storm, 2006: 14).

For instance, one of the internet online travel company, Expedia is using RSS and by using RSS, Expedia can deliver the latest prices on trips which its customers' are interested in and also feeing the customers from the trouble of making the same search over and over (http://www.expedia.com/daily/outposts/rss/expedia_rss.asp?rfrr=-52653).

Email Marketing: Practitioners introduce email that is one of the most reliable new medium as the ecommerce driver and customer relationship builder (Carlson Marketing, 2007: 2) . They also point out that customers still rely on email for their travel and holiday

purchasing information, ideas, news and interactive services. Especially "email" as a communication channel is the most effective marketing vehicle for tourism marketers to analyze real-time data at such a deep level. According to the report of Direct Marketing Association of US; email produces the highest response rate for lead generation of direct mail methods and email is also the cheapest way of running a campaign http://www.emarketer.com/Article.aspx?id=1005543&src=article1_newsltr).

With email marketing, companies may deliver the right message to the right person, on the right time, and in the channel most preferred by the customer (http://www.euromessage.eu/home). Tourism and travel professionals should rely on email marketing to acquire new customers (potentials) and strengthen relationships with actual ones. Email marketing should be an essential component in tourism and travel industry also. With the appropriate email tactics, companies may reinforce their customer relationship while converting their offerings to customers. Email marketing is an alternative way both reaching actual buyers but also finding the potentials.

In a recent web trends survey has been conducted by ReturnPath about holiday email consumers. According to ReturnPath's 2007 Annual Holiday Email Consumer Survey, 49.1% of shoppers receiving holiday focused email marketing actually took advantage of the email offers they received which means if the customer trusts the travel company whom they have found previous content to be valuable, they should give a feedback to the travel company. It also shows that retailers cited email marketing as the most important demand-generation activity for holiday success (http://www.returnpath.net/pdf/holidaySurvey06.pdf).

Blogs: The role of the internet and the new ways people use it to communicate are critical components of the sudden spread of word of mouth. Blogs started to become an important medium because they empower lots of people to share their ideas, to influence their minds by exchanging information. Word of mouth becomes very visible around blogs and online communities (Sernovitz, 2007: 27) . Because it's written down publicly for everyone to see. Many of the recommendations you'll read involve things you can do online, because it's the easiest way to reach people. With an estimated 80,000 blogs being created worldwide everyday (Weil, 2006: 3) It's has been argued that companies are terrified of bloggers (http://www.thecorporatebloggingbook.com) . Because today there are nearly 100 million of

them, according to Technorati (www.technorati.com/about/), and companies can not control them easily. But there's a way companies can defend their brands in the blogosphere. One of the accomodation and travel guide for Spain holiday and events is called www.spaindream.com is doing it. This site has a blog also where travellers can reach the blog from the main page. Sheraton Hotels are doing this (see: http://www.starwoodhotels.com/sheraton/resorts/results.html?amenity=Family); Hawthorne Hotel is doing it (see: http://www.hawthornehotel.blogspot.com).

Online Bookings: Booking online was such a foreign concept a few years ago, but today it is one of the fastest growing Internet industries. At "HotelsByCity.net" is an another example as a booking online company which lets its customers generate their messages with their blogs (www.hotelsbycity.net). In this company, customers can find reasonable online rates as well as exciting travel information. Whether people are searching for a romantic holiday, or a business trip; "HotelsByCity.net" has given the ultimate service for its customers. This company defined it's goal such as providing customers with the very best information so that the customer can make their best choice (http://www.hotelsbycity.net/corporate) . They define themselves not only offering best rates guaranteed, but also providing city guides, easily sign up periodical e-mails and newsletters, latest travel news provided by many of its blogs, google maps of each city which shows exactly where your hotel is located, saving rates hotel, publishing reviews getting the inside scoop, last minute deals, vacation packages, show tickets and anything can be a traveller may need.

Many visitor blogs are published at HotelsByCity.net. One of the blog's names is: Bed-jump. In this blog people all around the world take their photograps while jumping on the hotel-bed. They published their photograps on this blog included their comments, hotel details (http://www.hotelsbycity.net/blog/bed-jump). This site also contains hotelblogs inside. It demonstrates new hotels with different program offerrings. Bloggers post new items including photographs based on their likes and dislikes. Sometimes, any travel blog may represent "how blogs (also UGM) conveys a bad word of mouth due to a bad service. A customer shares her dissatisfaction about the hotel by posting an article complaing to the mass audience (http://www.hotelsbycity.net/blog/blog/2007/04/10/cant-get-no-satisfaction-the-insiders-guide-to-gettin-some/#more-143).

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Social Media and Virtual Communities: According to an e-book of Spannerworks (see further details: www.spannerworks.com), social media is best understood as a group of new kinds of online media which share most or all of the following characteristics such as "Participation, Openness, Conversation, Community and Connectedness" (http://www.spannerworks.com/fileadmin/uploads/eBooks/What_is_Social_Media.pdf   ). Social media encourages contributions and feedback from everyone who is interested. Most social media services are open to feedback and participation. They encourage voting, feedback, comments and sharing of information. On the other hand, whereas traditional media is about "broadcast", content transmitted or distributed to an audience, social media is better seen as mutual exchanging information which means, "two – way communication". Besides, social media allows communities to form quickly and communicate effectively around common interests (i.e; travel, holiday routes, favorite destinations and food locations. Social media perform via links and combines different media in one place . (http://www.spannerworks.com/fileadmin/uploads/eBooks/What_is_Social_Media.pdf).

Wikipedia defines virtual communities as an online community which is made up of a group of people that interact via communication media such as letters, telephone, email, internet rather than using personal communication (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Virtual_community).   It has also claimed that significant socio-technical changes may have resulted from the proliferation of such internet-based social networks.

"Yahoo Travel" (http://travel.yahoo.com) announced a new personalized "Trip Recommendations" module - the first of its kind for the travel industry - as well as a number of additional product and site enhancements. All of these new features are designed to make "Yahoo Travel" as one of the best online resource for travellers to research and plan their trips. "We want to fundamentally transform the way people plan and research their trips and our Trip Recommendations are designed to inspire people with new ideas of where to go, and the best price for getting there," said Jasper Malcolmson, director of "Yahoo Travel" (http://yhoo.client.shareholder.com/press/releasedetail.cfm?ReleaseID=241644).   The new version of Yahoo Travel integrates personalized trip recomendations which have posted by the travellers: Personalized Trip Recommendations is a good example for showing the ultimate importance of user generated contents: "Today's Picks" module highlights the

destinations which are highly-relevant to individual users, based on recent online activity and preferences. This module offers a source of new travel ideas also links to related air/hotel deals, weather, travel tips from Yahoo users and a destination Travel Guide. An additional "Show Me" drop-down box provides users with more theme-driven suggestions in categories such as, nightlife, art / architecture, family, romance, beach and hiking & camping (http://travel.yahoo.com/;_ylc=X3oDMTE5MGRqZDdoBF9TAzI3MTYxNDkEc2VjA2ZwL XRyb3VnaARzbGsDc3Bpcml0LWZpeGVk). Travelers can now insert tags within the "Yahoo Travel Trip Planner" such as they can tag their weekend trip plan to Paris as "romantic" to better organize their Trip Plans and give other users an advantage to discover interesting travel information (for further information see: http://travel.yahoo.com/p-reviews-373502-prod-hotel-action-read-ratings_and_reviews-i;_ylt=An.WdGxEYrkgY7Jb.SEVTd3iphQB#9).

Forums: Forums are discussion groups http://www.webopedia.com/TERM/F/forum.html). Newsgroups are the internet version of forums. Internet users can participate in newsgroups to share information, with the result that word of mouth becomes as an important purchasing influence. Word about good restaurants and hotels travels fast. Word about bad restaurants and hotels travels faster (Kotler, et al., 2006: 695).

One of the recent study from United Kingdom regulator, "Ofcom" (http://www.ofcom.org.uk) shows that due to the rapid growth in the reach and usage of social networking websites; the majority of 16 to 24 years olds are switching from traditional media to online interactive media such as "Youtube", "MySpace". These sites allow users to create online profiles and connect with their friends or others with similar interests. The research also demonstrates that over 40% of adults with internet access have used these sites; that figure rises to 70% among 16-24 year-olds, with over half in this age group using them at least weekly http://www.ofcom.org.uk/research/cm/cm06).

2. WORD OF MOUTH MARKETING (WOMM)

Today, more consumers are relying on advice from friends, family and even strangers to make their purchase decisions, select restaurants, choose travel destinations and even pick politicians to vote for. Already, 64 million US adults regularly share advice on products or

services, and over 25 million of them wield their influence online (http://www.emarketer.com/Report.aspx?code=emarketer_2000419&src=report_summary_re portsell).

This "Word-of-Mouth Marketing Report" explores the increasingly important phenomenon of consumer recommendations and warnings. "Word of mouth is playing an increasing role in how consumers make decisions: everything from what to buy, which doctor to see and where to travel, to what school to choose," said Debra Aho Williamson, senior analyst at eMarketer (http://www.emarketer.com/Article.aspx?id=1005671&src=article5_newsltr): "It is often one of the top sources consumers cite". Most travelers have stories about the time that they had spent at hotels or restaurants or on their way to airports, airline agencies and travel agencies. Sometimes travelers complain about the poor services, they say that they will never return to that facility again and also will tell about their dissapointing experiences to thousands of potential customers, family members, friends, e.t.c. On the other hand, stories are not always negative. There are so many travellers telling about their satisfactions to other people arround them.

The ideas of word of mouth marketing in the tourism & travel industries must be held by all employees, it should not be left to the sales and public relations departments and this function should be carried out by all line employees (Kotler, et al., 2006: 356). The tourism and travel industries should know well that the bad service encounters receive more attention than the good ones. When customers have been treated badly, they respond by talking about these incidents (Ibid. 356)

Studies show that when people have a good experience, they tell about it to five people. If they have a bad experience, they tell to ten (Tschohl, 1991: 3). Therefore, it can be assumed that , spreading positive word of mouth is much more difficult. A few negative words may offset many good stories (Kotler, et al.:356)
Andy Sernovitz as quoted in his book Word of Mouth Marketing: How Smart Companies Get People Talking; claims that people love to talk about products and services and also about their cars, computers, favorite tv shows, favorite restaurants and their favorite travel destinations, e.t.c.. (Sernovitz A., 2007: 66). Sernovitz also says that people are talking about

the companies and what the companies sell. It might be a personal criticism or an individual recommendation or an scathing attack. He added that it might be an scathing attack which has been posted to Amazon.com where 20 million consumers would read it before they'd decided whether to buy the product or not. Sernovitz defines WOM as "giving people a reason to talk about a stuff and making it easier for that conversation to take place (Ibid: 66).

Another definition of WOM is called a process which allows consumers to share information and their opinions which direct buyers towards and away from specific products, services and brands (Litvin et al., 2007: 2-3). In past decades, WOM was defined as face – to – face communication concerning their products or companies between those people who were not commercial entities (Carl, 2006: 601-602).

Although word of mouth is a very effective marketing tool, Smith and Vogt claim in their literature that companies, products and brands can be easily manipulated by word of mouth (Smith and Vogt, 1995: 133). Litvin, Goldsmith and Pan also contributed to this matter, the fact that new problems may arise given the anonymity of communicators, potentially leading to intentionally misleading and out of context messages (Litvin, et al., 2007: 6).

3. USER GENERATED CONTENT IN TOURISM MARKETING

User Generetated Contents such as social media and virtual communities (i.e. Youtube, MySpace, Facebook) have made it possible for anyone to become a journalist, reporter, producer, influencer, a social advisor or a marketing pioneer that this should be a frightening improvement for tourism and travel industry. No one can deny the fact of old traditional media world is no longer available in the new era. It is no longer relevant to their interests, lifestyles and personalities. User generated content lets customer get involved with blogs, virtual communities, online games, satellite radios and videos, smartphones have enabled mobility, available communication everywhere and for sure it enables and elevates user generated comments.

From this starting point, users start to feel more involved in any interested topics, hence they have found a big tool to have mobility and community (Dickey and Sullivan, 2007: 10). They feel free themselves to generate content for the new media. They can post

comments, post about their likes and dislikes, share their opinions with millions, advertise and promote their favorite locations, hotels, restaurants, e.t.c. via social networks on the internet, direct others, change other's opininons in discussion forums, posts photographs and videos, send their positive or negative comments to such as online complaint sites. Tourism and travel companies should make marketing researches by measuring, understanding and chasing this changed horizon by adjusting their marketing strategies according to these circumstances. From the tourism and travel perspective, unless they do, they may take big risk of losing control of their brand management and also lose their actual customers as well as they may face the danger of failing to capture potential customers.

"Six in 10 consumers give and receive advice" said Lisa Bradner, analyst at Forrester. "The rest are actively involved in generating and sharing comments" (Forrester, 2007:1). Forrester analysis also showed that six in 10 US consumers surveyed said they shared product advice with family and friends (Word of Mouth for the Masses, 2007, for further info, see: http://www.emarketer.com/Article.aspx?id=1005671&src=article5_newsltr).

Today, consumers have more ways to wield their influence and opinion than ever before, but the content generated by the consumer becomes a double-edged sword for companies (http://www.emarketer.com/Report.aspx?code=emarketer_2000419&src=report_summary_re portsell). Unfortunately, the more companies try to control or direct comments may cause greater risk of failure.

In user generated comments review sites, travellers speak directly to company and it's personnel. Experts claim that this is better than a comment card (http://www.hotel-online.com/News/PR2007_3rd/Sept07_ReviewSites.html). It is critical of these review sites just as the industry has had a love / hate relationship with the online travel agencies. It all began with Trip Advisor when built the same reaction from many hoteliers as the online travel agencies did when they first arrived – platforms that many loved to hate. Neither Trip Advisor, the online travel agencies nor Web 2.0 are going away – they will only become more dominant in how customers find them, research them and select their travel and hotel arrangements.

According to Henry Elliss, the Head of Social Media at Tamar said that the rapid growth of user generated content is shifting the balance of power from marketers towards consumer hence so many consumers became more active making comments on brands through social networks (Tamar 2007 Social Media for Brands Report, 2007: 2).

However, this survey shows that the brands must make sure when targeting consumers through social networks, as British consumers are easily deterred by negative comments on social networks and more than three quarters of social networkers are actively commenting on brands through social networks. Approximately 80% of people who use social networks have either discussed, commented on or reviewed a brand or product on an online forum or social network, it has been revealed (Ibid:1).

Latest research of Tamar reveals in UK that negative comments in natural search results, online forums and social networks have a deep impact (Tamar 2007 Search Attitudes Report, 2007:3). It's possible that this research can be adopted in any country. Although the cultural behaviors and attitudes may vary in each country, improvements on internet and new media revealed similar point of interests and attitudes. The rise of social networking and citizen journalism has put a new role model by effecting brands and managing their online reputation. Brand image and reputation can take years, and it needs millions of dollars to build. It should be the thing that companies hold most precious. Companies should not let even one negative blog comment is unnoticeable.

CONCLUSION

Anybody in anywhere may discuss something important about company's business; it can be about the brand, or about the company's executives, about competitors, or the industry. Discussions may help the company to enhance it's reputation, image and brand name. On the other hand, when they criticize the company's service, complain to others about new products, it may decrease the reputation and lead any company into a severe problem (Beal, 2007:1). Reputation may be destroyed in an hour by any blogger who's upset with the company. It can also spread like a virus with the praise of just one customer, at one message board. It can also crash in months if it fails to listen to what its customers expect. Businesses should have an understanding of just how powerful consumer generated media (CGM) is. There is an increasing number of user generated comments such as online complaint sites

waiting for dissatisfied consumers to lodge a complaint (Zaugg, 2007: 5). The impact of mobile and internet communications as well as the user generated content will continue to grow. Travel companies should emphasise and give utmost importance to how travel content developed by the customers. Scholars represent that this medium would be a natural for the travel industry. When user generated content combined with negative word of mouth on the internet, companies may face a challenging threat (Hong and Lee, 2005: 98) and this may lead to a loss of corporate reputation. Broadbridge and Marsall claim that if the company ignores the e-channel for complaints, dissatisfied customers intend to express their dissatisfaction online; such as other online complaint intermediaries or spread negative word of mouth , not only verbal but also online forums with hundred thousands of user capacities (Broadbridge and Marshall, 1995: 16). Therefore companies should consider not only the costs of recovering their service, but also the cost of lost customer. According to Kotler, Bowen and Makers; companies should pay close attention to their customer defection rate and undertake steps to reduce it. They also add that companies can estimate how much profit they lose when customers defect and how much it would cost to reduce the defection rate. If the cost is less than the lost profits, the company should spend that amount to reduce customer defections (Kotler, et al, 2006: 401).

Today, successfull companies can retain their customers. Although competition is increasing and the costs of attracting new customers are rising, retaining current customers are much more effective and cheaper.The complaint solving may turn a lot of negative word of mouth comments into positive word of mouth. Negative word of mouth concerns lot of negative comments which are conveyed by the customers. Therefore, user generated comments (they are message contents indeed) could lead customer defection and this would put tourism and travel industry in a risk. Managers and the employees at this industry should seek complaints and resolve their problems quickly. The reputation is very important issue for service providers. Managing the reputation has a strong link to generating customer comments. Customers hold ultimate power generating comments. Best services and best quality build loyal customers and create positive comments about the company which returns repeating purchasing effort and positive word of mouth. Tourism and travel industry should be aware of the fact that if a satisfied customer will spread a recommendation by word of mouth, on average, one satisfied customer will tell five others, while a dissatisfied customer will ten or more people (Ibid: 409 – 410). Managers should pick up information on how

customers feel about their hotel, travel agency, restaurant or any travel products by searching for their comments online and identify any discussing forums, newsgroups, blogs where their corporate names and their business is discussed. Tourism and travel marketers should have an understanding of just how powerful consumer generated comment is (Beal, 2007:1).

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