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THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA ENGAGEMENT ON CUSTOMER LOYALTY: MEDIATION INFLUENCE OF POSITIVE E-WOM ON AGRITOURISM GREEN HOTELS

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Abstract: This review examines social media engagement and customer loyalty in the green hotels based on agritourism in Huaihai Economic Zone (Xuzhou, Lianyun Gang, Huaian), as a target area. This study relay on the (UGT) to understand how social media will attempt and analysis consumers' behavior. The proposed research model has supported as well as the accompanying hypotheses. The findings demonstrate that social media engagement has a positive influence on customer loyalty. And social media engagement positively influences positiveE-WOM.Moreover, E-WOM has effects on customer loyalty andE-WOMmediates the relationship between social media engagement and customer loyalty.

Key words: Social media engagement - Customer loyalty- positive E-WOM- Agritourism-Green hotel- Huaihai Economic Zone.

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1 Introduction

The tourism industry is one of the world's largest industry which considers as a pillar of any country's economic development industries. China has already become an important power in the global tourism economy and considered as an interesting and relevant location for many tourists. Eastern China's coastline has been regarded as an

interesting and appropriate location. Huaihai Economic Zone actively consolidates traditional markets, vigorously develops a new market, attracting a large number of national and international tourists. As a result of increasing competition and the development of communications and internet technology in the past decades have led to the need for finding new strategies to face this

competition. Social media has changed the promotion strategy for many companies, including the tourism and hospitality industry. Tourism and regional economy have impacts on domestic tourism, a number of attractions, and star-rated hotels, etc. Thereby promoting tourism and regional economy achieve a coordinated quality of development in Jiangsu (周慧慧 et al., 2016). The change from the cooperative system to the household-based farming system started in 1978 (Lin, 1992). Chinese rural policy began at the end of 1978. Green Hotel sector need to improve their image by using social media as a strategy to create a positive image (Ge et al., 2018) of the green hotel as well as create loyalty of customers and attract new customers as a result of the positive E-WOM. There is a lack in the studies which explore the relationship between social media engagement (Ogbuji and Papazafeiropoulou, 2016; Husnain and Toor, 2017) and customer loyalty (van Asperen et al., 2018). The lack of studies in this field led the researcher to study the mediating impact of positive E-WOM (Ismagilova et al., 2016; Jalonen and Jussila, 2016) on the relationship between social media engagement (Husnain and Toor, 2017; Ogbuji and Papazafeiropoulou, 2016) and customer loyalty (van Asperen et al., 2018; C. Cheung et al., 2011) in Huaihai Economic Zone (Xuzhou, Lianyun Gang, Huaian). Because of the importance of social

media engagement in the hotel sector, it is necessary to know the other factors which influence the development of the hotel industry such as previous experience, friends' talk, quality of services, service rates, location, the interior environment of the hotel (Gnanapala, 2014). Customer loyalty must be studied to show whether social media is affecting customer loyalty directly or must be through positive E-WOM. If there is loyalty from the customer, this will lead to spreading the positive image of the hotel. facing the competition they should use social media as strategy in the green hotel at agritourism sector to gain customer loyalty by creating positive E-WOM, such as what they published or post their experiences to achieve the customer loyalty and get new customers. The current study, will benefit decision-makers and hoteliers with many benefits such as presented them a vision about social media and its effectiveness in creating customer loyalty through E-WOM, so they will choose the right strategy for them, for example focusing on direct conversation with customers as well as responding directly to their questions and comments which make them satisfied with this hotel.

2 Literature Review and Hypothesis development

2.1.Agritourism and green hotel

The use of technology in any field is very important for any organization to achieve its objectives. Technical progress mostly affects the

agro-tourism industry, the richness of product mix. (Mao et al., 2018). The past 20 years have viewed a marked rise in the supply of rural tourism in the formula of "Nong Jia le" tourism. According to (Shao, 2007) the director of China National Tourism Administration (CNTA), since 1980, more than 20,000 visitor attractions have been founded, more than half of which is located in large areas of Chinese countryside with 359 national representative sites of rural tourism areas founded by (CNTA) across 31 provinces of China and separate regions, covering a multiplicity of agro-industries. Every year during the "Golden Week" holidays on Labor Day (1st of May), National Day (1st of October) and Spring Festival (Chinese New Year), 70% of the country's urban population choose rural tourism to choose their options in the promenade, producing domestic marketplace for rural tourism enjoys 60 million tourists per golden week (Shao, 2007). The most appreciated accommodation is those located in calm and quiet environments which do not take into account or escape from agricultural activities (Fleischer and Tchetchik, 2005; Walford, 2001). (McGehee, 2007; McGehee et al., 2007) said that agritourism is rural projects which include both an occupied farm environment and a profitable tourism component. (Iakovidou, 1997) define Agro tourism as tourism activities that are assumed in non-urban districts by people whose main occupation is in

the main or subordinate segment of the economy. Under growing ecological pressure, hotel operators want to increase their access to international agreements while preserving good performance for sustainable improvement. In the hospitality industry, the damaging influence of hotels on the environment has attracted the customer's attention (Chen and Peng, 2012). In the last few years, guests' requests for environmentally responsible housing have quickly increased (Chen and Tung, 2014). As that today's customers are progressively complex to environmental problems and are enthusiastically exchanging their consumption habits, reducing environmental damages by the greening of hotel procedures is becoming important to sustaining effectiveness or finding competitive benefits in the accommodation marketplace (Han, 2015; Jones et al., 2014). The word green is instead identified as eco-friendly environmentally friendly or sustainable (Han et al., 2009; Pizam, 2009). According to the Green Hotel Associations GHA, (Green Hotel Association, 2009) and DEP (Department of Environmental Protection, 2001), a green hotel is an eco-friendly accommodation possession that has applied several green practices and establishments environmentally friendly agendas to protect the environment and decrease functioning charges. With the growing interest in environmental issues among hotel

customers recently, sustainability has become a significant business problem, rising from fears about the exhaustion of natural resources, wealth disparities and social responsibility (Hallam and Contreras, 2016). The study will employ Uses and Gratification Theory (UGT), which developed by (Blumler and Katz, 1974). This theory is mostly used on predictable media as an attempt to analysis consumers' behavior. This theory has also been knowingly useful on social media researches (E. W. Ngai et al., 2015). In the framework of this study, the usage of the (UGT) is grounded on the supposition that the consumer is an active and self-conscious supplier in choice media; the consumer is also motivated by private aims rather than the impact of the media. This theory consequently adopts the situation that the consumers will be affected positively from social media which leads to achieving their desires and thus their satisfaction. Therefore, it is the consumer's satisfaction that would lead to customer loyalty by using frequent media. Consequently, the suitable media mean will be selected by the consumer and will be measured to show the value-focused and target-oriented (Dahl, 2018). The usage of the (UGT) considered by several social media researches mainly, for discovering the consumptions and drives behind social network platform application (Wang et al., 2016) for recognizing the influences which drive the consumers engagement in social

network platform (de Oliveira et al., 2016) to develop models and expectations that seek to motivate positive engagement behavior and loyalty towards the organization with other structures containing usage intensity, brand strength and brand loyalty (De Vries and Carlson, 2014) for investigative social media content (Dolan et al., 2016) and for examining mobile social network advertising (Wu, 2016). The (UGT) has been used on traditional platforms as well as on technological media as a means of knowing how the emotional, cognitive and other developing needs of the consumers, are satisfied; it has also been used in particular cases as a means to know how the different media had positively attracted consumer viewers (Khan, 2017). Constructed on its big and effective applications, it is consequently discussed that the (UGT) appropriates well with this study which goals to examine how social media engagement influence customer loyalty on green hotels. Enterprises contribution products and services are determined to attract the attention of social network consumers, these enterprises are restructuring their marketing policies and strategies. It is important to know how effective is social media in developing purchase intentions between consumers which led to loyalty. (Smith, 2011a) has shown that 88 % of dealers are employing social media as a marketing means where a total of USD 60 billion is being spent every year for social media advertisements in the U.S. To

date, the significance of the social media engagement has been emphasized however there has been little understanding on how social media engagement would lead to

consumers' customer loyalty in services industry (Khan, 2017).

This study will study the relationship between these variables which shown in figure 1.

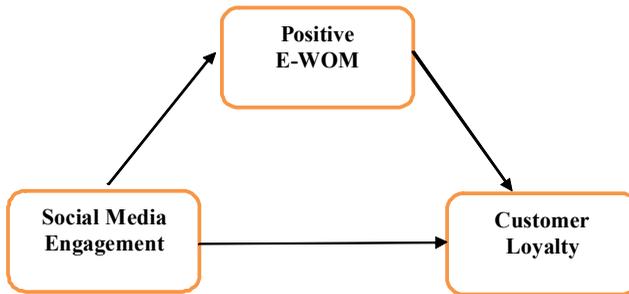


Figure 1 shows the variable of study

2.2. Customer Loyalty

The concept of customer loyalty is essential in the field of marketing in general. The most generally used definition of loyalty was given by (McMullan and Gilmore, 2008) as, the influenced behavioral reaction (i.e., purchase), expressed over time by some decision-making units, with the difference to one or more other brands out of a set of such brands and is a function of psychological manners. Customers are always willing to pay more, express their highest buying intentions and resist the search for other competitors (Gavilan et al., 2018). In this sense, it is essential that companies have such loyal customers. Loyal customers are supportable income contributors, as well as E-WOM providers are free and consistent, so that they help to get new customers to the firms. Some

scholars view customer loyalty from a behavioral side (Too et al., 2001). Behavioral loyalty contains measurements of buying, the regularity of buying, repeat buying, and less price sensitivity and intentional information to the hotel. Customer loyalty growth is one of the most preferred marketing goals and has, therefore, received wide care in the literature. Even though its importance, there is no unanimity on loyalty's basic dynamic or enhancing factors, which have been found to vary generally through situations. For example, several types of research emphasis on customer trust (So et al., 2016), satisfaction (Rather, 2018) or perceived quality (Liat et al., 2017) as basic loyalty experiences, others focus the significance of customer commitment (Su et al., 2016), engagement (Linda D Hollebeek et

al., 2014;Hollebeek et al., 2016;Rather and Sharma, 2017) or expected value (So et al., 2013). Enhanced understanding of the main drivers of loyalty - even though discussed - is critical to contemporary organizations given its direct influence on firm competitiveness and profitability, including in the hospitality sector (Nunkoo et al., 2017; Pizam et al., 2016). Customer submitted WOM, online or offline, positive or negative, is closely studied by potential customers, making it an influential marketing tool (Khare et al., 2011), such that customer relationships trust and engagement with the establishment (Eisingerich et al., 2014) as a mandatory strategic emphasis for establishments. (Lee et al., 2012) found some factors which might offer the hotel more benefits over its rivals in the industry, as service quality, customer satisfaction, customer loyalty, and company image.

2.3. Social Media Engagement and customer loyalty

Social media engagement is the immediate effort and expression of a person's "preferred-self" in task activities that promote influences to work and to others, personal presence (physical, cognitive, and emotional), and active, the full role of performance (van Asperen et al., 2018). Social media become a very important mean for organizations and customers, building strong relationships with them, and make them loyal to the company (van Asperen et al., 2018). (Harrigan et

al., 2017;Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010; E. W. T. Ngai et al., 2015) said, social media is the correct platform which constructs on the conceptual and technological basics of Web 2.0 that bearing the promotional activities efficiently connect with the directed consumer and get information for increasing favorites about products /brands. Jack Ma, the founder of the biggest Chinese e-commerce company, Ali Baba, claimed that he could not get benefits from the social networking platform as a way to interact with consumers and other companies or that the possibilities could lead them to be excluded from business, and they lose their position in the market (Barhemmati and Ahmad, 2015). (van Asperen et al., 2018) focus on passive and active customer engagement with a travel agency's social media activities and show its impacts on affective and conative loyalty, reflect on the importance of social communication activities of the organization. (Smith, 2011b) has shown that 88 % of marketers are using social media as a marketing instrument where a total of USD 60 billion is being spent every year for social media advertisements in the U.S. Social media plays an increasingly important role in the tourism industry. On one hand, consumers can post hotel reviews and ratings, upload vacation photographs, and share tourism experiences on social media sites these communication methods have transformed consumer research and decision-making processes for

consumers. On the other hand, tourism specialists and establishments have known the influence of social media and rely on these platforms as innovative channels to communicate with tourists and promote related products (Yang and Wang, 2015). Even though a number of researches have valued the social media performance of hotels (Leung et al., 2013; Virginia Phelan et al., 2013), they all tend to overlook the advantages of the promotional features of social media for hotels and neglect the use of social media for distributing information. Now largely lacking a standard for evaluating the contribution of social media because hotels are still in the experimental phase of using social media as a marketing tool and exploring best practices to promote their products and related business services through social media websites (Inversini and Masiero, 2014). Engagement with a business by social media makes a feeling of associated for customers (Walsh et al., 2013) presented a positive relationship between a brand's image and customers' social media use. (Dijkmans et al., 2015) proved the positive relationship between the corporate reputation and social media engagement of an airline company. Research of (Shu and Scott, 2014) presented that social media content had a positive impact on perceived tourism destination desirability. (Mangold and Faulds, 2009) found that customers feel more engaged with products and

firms when they can submit a response, which improved the engagement levels and lead to an advanced likeliness of interactive through social media or E-WOM by likes or send it to friends. Therefore this study proposed the following hypothesis:

H1: Social media engagement has a positive influence on customer loyalty.

2.4. Positive E-WOM

Electronic word-of-mouth (E-WOM) has become a main source of information because of its improved capacity, spreading, perseverance and observation, anonymity and deception, rise of equivalence, and community engagement conducted a comprehensive review of the E-WOM and classified it into two lines of study: precedents of E-WOM and effects of E-WOM (King et al., 2014). (Chu and Kim, 2011) defined E-WOM as an information-sharing behavior that focuses on products among online peer consumers, traffic behavior that can affect information flow, and should be considered as one of the components of this E-WOM behavior. E-WOM refers to any positive or negative statement made by potential, actual, or former customers about a product or company, which is made available to a multitude of people and institutions via the Internet (Venkatesan, 2017). E-WOM in tourism is as blogs, comments, pictures and/or videos on customers' personal social media networks (e.g. Blogs, Facebook, and Twitter)

(Yoo and Gretzel, 2011). The influence of customer engagement on E-WOM was repeatedly argued in consumer engagement literature as a study of (Venkatesan, 2017). Electronic word-of-mouth, such as online reviews and online recommendations are a significant tool for growing the demand for a green hotel. For decades, the hotel and hospitality industry researchers have examined the problem of the factors that affect the decision to book accommodation (Radojevic et al., 2015; Yang et al., 2016). When making a hotel booking decisions online, people use consumer ratings as a sign to assess former customers' experiences with the promoted hotel (Vinzencz, 2019). Currently, hotels' sustainability efforts are a significant additional standard that factors into customers' booking behavior (Vinzencz, 2019). Customers' preference for the product rises along with the number of online reviews (Viglia et al., 2014). The influence of E-WOM on a customer's action is more significant for the service industry (Hu and Kim, 2018). Even though E-WOM motivational scopes are available in the hospitality and tourism context, not obviously distinguishable among positive and negative (e.g., or only emphases on one valence, typically positive, so that this study will use positive E-WOM because it has more influence between the customer's loyalty (Yang, 2017a).

For the reason that customers' E-WOM motivations rely on the environment of their consumption

experience (positive vs. negative (Yang, 2017a; Zhang et al., 2017), it seems reasonable to have a separate set of E-WOM motivations by the parity of service experiences. Electronic word of mouth E-WOM being concentrated via social media, products discover strategies to involve consumers talking and interacting with others round their products (Kotler et al., 2014). (Habibi et al., 2014), advocated that advanced engaged consumers on social media could achieve more information about the product and could be more likely to brand features. In the same line, brands are trying to attract consumers to join their social media platform to encourage them to share positive E-WOM (Gvili et al., 2018). Additionally, reviews and rating products online which generated from brand engagement with consumers, always develop E-WOM (Yan et al., 2018). E-WOM is being promoted by social media, and brands find strategies to engage consumers to talk to others and interact with their products (Kotler et al., 2014). However, it can also be claimed that the customer's intention to disseminate a positive E-WOM had better have a positive influence on his/her perception of the brand's reputation. Xie and Lee (Xie et al., 2011) claimed that E-WOM is common in today's accommodation market and has the potential to affect consumer decisions. Brands are trying to attract consumers to join their social media platforms to encourage them to share

positive E-WOM (Gvili et al., 2018). Ye Law (Ye et al., 2009) showed in their research that positive online reviews can significantly growth in the number of hotel reservations. Based on the previous discussion the study proposed the following hypotheses:

H2: Social media engagement positively has an influence on positive E-WOM.

H3: Positive E-WOM has a positive influence on customer loyalty.

H4: Positive E-WOM has a mediating influence on the relationship between social media engagement and customer loyalty.

3. Conclusion and discussion

Based on the User Gratification Theory, this study explores the relationship between social media engagement, customer loyalty, and positive E-WOM focus. This study offers a conceptual model showing the relationship between the variables theoretically and need empirical studies to support theoretical relations. It is also illustrated that social media engagement assists as an essential factor in affecting customer loyalty among consumers. The role of positive E-WOM, as a mediator in this study, simplify and clarify how the organization might use social media as a tool to increase customer loyalty. Conversely, there is a lack of studies into the influence of social media on consumer behavior, particularly on customer loyalty (Hudson and Thal, 2013; Shu and Scott, 2014).

3.1 Social media engagement has a positive influence on customer loyalty.

According to the literature related to social media engagement and customer loyalty, there is a positive relationship between social media engagement and customer loyalty as it showed on the study of (Leung and Bai, 2013; Dholakia and Durham, 2010; Brodie et al., 2013). In order to investigate the rationality of that proposition, hypothesis H1 was accepted.

3.2 Social media engagement positively has an influence on positive E-WOM.

Social media platforms can efficiently motivate positive E-WOM. The impact of using social media on E-WOM was investigated in this study. The proposed hypotheses (H2) regarding this impact was developed according to the literature of (Chu et al., 2019; Chan et al., 2014; C. M. Cheung et al., 2011; Zhao et al., 2016) who said there is a positive influence of consumer engagement on social media engagement and E-WOM.

3.3 Positive E-WOM has a significant influence on customer loyalty.

The creation of positive E-WOM is a very important in hotel services, not only by positively impacting the reputation of the hotel but also because it facilitates attracting new guests in a context where the vast majority of consumers express that they do not book a hotel without seeing guest's reviews from previous hotel customers. This study suggests

that providing emotional experiences to customers during their stay is one way to increase the likelihood of positive comments through different social media platforms. Based on the literature related to positive E-WOM and its influence on customer loyalty, the results of (Swanson and Hsu, 2009; Yang, 2017b) said customer gratification, in himself, does not assurance E-WOM creation. These results were in conflict with our study findings. While the results of (Serra-Cantalops et al., 2018; Yacouel and Fleischer, 2012; Anderson, 2012) were supported hypothesis H3.

3.4 Positive E-WOM mediates the relationship between social media engagement and customer loyalty.

As expected, this study suggests that positive E-WOM plays a role as a mediator between social media engagement and customer loyalty. Based on this result, it is assumed that this result highlights the influence of social media which green hotels depend on in their effort to strategically position customer engagement, from which the full possible of their consumers can be loyal. Researchers suggest that Positive E-WOM has been found to mediate the relationship between information adoption and online buying behavior of local fashion clothing brand products (Rahman and Mannan, 2018). In contrast to the research of (Almeshal and Alhidari, 2018) which proposed that E-WOM as a

mediator has no effect on consumer apparent value also no support for the mediation relationship between brand trust, product design, and consumer perceived value. The conclusions added from this study will be capable to give the literature framework in several ways. First, this review disseminates knowledge about how social media engagement relates to customer loyalty. In the rapidly growing world of technology, the Huaihai Economic Zone also seems to have qualified with rapid advances in social media use in the past few years, which conclude a specific study to be directed within the area framework. The outcomes support the statement that many green hotel customers are engaged with social media platforms such as Wechat. However, the previous researches focused on social media marketing uses and gratification theory (UGT) as a methodology, plurality had concentrated on the purpose users be presented to definite media. Even so, this study is capable of growing the using of the UGT to show the consequence of social media engagement and its influence on customer loyalty. In that favor, this study has shown that Wechat might be used as a marketing tool to effectively stimulate customer loyalty. This argument between researchers may give an explanation of the unexpected results and may support our explanation about the cause of these results.

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