Customer Engagement through Social Media: Learnings from Hospitality Industry in India

Amit Jain[1],
Shubham Jain[2],
Manipal University Jaipur, India
[1]amit.jain@jaipur.manipal.edu

and Sonal Jain[3]
JK Lakshmipat University, India

***Abstract* - Hospitality is a dynamic and evolving industry but the basics of customer or service orientation always remain the same. Increased competition and development of new offline and online models in past decades has forced the industry to go back to the basics and develop connect with its customers. There is great deal of need to create a robust brand image and to engage customers effectively. Web 2.0 and Social media holds the answer to both the quests. Hospitality businesses across the globe are utilizing different social media platforms to actively engage the customers who are also the co-creators in the total value creation and delivery process. This paper, with extensive review of literature and a primary research, attempts to see the changes happening in the hospitality industry from social media point of view and to check the extent and effectiveness of the use of popular social media platforms by the largest hospitality brands in India. The objective is to understand the status and find out the gaps that need to be plugged for effective customer engagement through various social media platforms. The study provides learning for Hospitality industry to effectively harness the power of social networks and leverage their CRM efforts.**

***Keywords* - Customer Engagement, Social Media, Digital Marketing, Hospitality**

I. INTRODUCTION

Service has been the very essence of Indian culture and traditions. The change in demography and socio economic conditions has led to a service sector boom in India. Social media has changed the strategy of promotion for many businesses including Hospitality sector. Hotels are promoting themselves through various social media tools like Facebook, Instagram, twitter etc. These Social Networking Sites (SNS) help to share information, ideas, personal message and other contents thereby helping to engage with the customers. Social Media not only facilitates interaction between the customers themselves but also between the customer and the company.

According to a survey by pewinternet.org, 73% of the adults worldwide uses social media for a variety of purposes [1]. Therefore, the organizations have realized the power of social media and have been incorporating the use of social media in their marketing communication, customer engagement, branding etc. according to a survey 93% of the companies uses social media for their marketing efforts [2].

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The advent of Social Media tools has been one of the most relevant technological innovations in recent years and has strongly impacted the tourism industry. Despite the numerous benefits that Social Media can offer to hotels, transforming the way they relate to

customers and opening a vast array of new possibilities, its implementation implies also numerous challenges. A study of European sample of 312 hotels suggested that review sites and social networks were the most used tools [3]. Different social media sites demonstrate similarities in the tactics being used by Hotel managers especially for Facebook and Twitter [4]. The size and the age of the hotel chain influence the increased use of Web 2.0 and social communication media [5]. Crafting right online strategies to compete with other hotels and mediators is important [6]. Case studies of eight Australian accommodation STEs were analyzed and reported insights into Facebook use and implementation. Even with early adopters, a pre-planned Facebook strategy was found to be poorly understood and in many instances had not been developed and implemented appropriately [7]. Marketing performance of 67 hotels in Hong Kong on 23 social media sites was evaluated according to 18 criteria adapted from past studies. The results indicated that hotels generally have a poor performance in using social media to learn about customers [8]. Three different social influence factors, namely, compliance, internalization, and identification, had different effects on fans' attitudes toward hotel Facebook pages and behavioral intentions to like hotel Facebook pages [9]. To evaluate hotel companies' social media marketing efforts "6Is" of Involvement, Interaction Intimacy, influence, insights and impact has been used. The findings indicate that the majority of the hotels actively and consistently use the Sina Weibo and Wechat platforms for their social media marketing [10]. A content analysis of 1,519 comments from members of five major hotel programs indicated that communication is the most important loyalty antecedent, and that all antecedents influence loyalty via the program experience [11]. The study by having an experimental, between-group and post-test-only design revealed that embedded social media channels on the hotel Web site enhanced travelers' social gratifications of perceived social interaction [12]. In the context of embedded social media channels, the gratification factors, such as perceived enjoyment and perceived social interaction, directly influenced traveler satisfaction and purchase intentions, and indirectly influenced purchase intentions through traveler satisfaction [13]. Hotel businesses consider accuracy, transparency and consistency of content and pricing to be essential prerequisites of competitiveness. Although, while using channels as TripAdvisor there are concerns regarding fake reviews [14]. A study focused on use of Twitter as a communication tool by hotels to engage with their stakeholders found that there is a significant positive relationship between a hotel's size and its Twitter activity and a significant negative relationship between the audience and the stakeholder engagement [15]. The study showed a positive relationship between user satisfaction with a hotel's Facebook page and intention to stay at that hotel in the future [16]. Several studies have been done specifically with Hotel but studies specific to geographic region of India are missing. The present research work focuses on basic work by a sample of organizations in hospitality industry India and assess their social media engagement.

III. METHODOLOGY

This section outlines the purpose and method of the study.

A. Rationale of the Study

This paper showcases study of the status of customer engagement and brand building by major hotels using social media. This study tries to explore and analyze the way these hotels are presently using the social media technologies particularly Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and Instagram to engage their audience. The objective is to understand the general trend in the hospitality industry with respect to use of social media and draw learning for the entire industry.

B. Methodology

The methodology used in this research is Content Analysis, to explore and understand how hotels are creating value from social media technologies. The unit of analysis for

the study is the home page of the hotels and a single drill down each for Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and Instagram links. The sample for this study was taken as major 5 star hotels, although the focus was on high ranked hotels of Jaipur City of Rajasthan India, the webpages of selected hotels ultimately landed to the website of the group companies to which these properties belonged. Content was analyzed on different aspects including the hotels use of links on the home page, level of engagement from the guest as well as the frequency of communication (visibility) and one way or two way communications (engagement & relationship building). The data collecting template was designed using these themes and the data was collected by the researchers to ensure consistency, objectivity and accuracy. To further enhance the accuracy, all the similar data pertaining to all the hotels was collected at the same time, to the extent possible. The process was repeated for Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and YouTube for each of the hotels. The hotels selected for the study were Fairmont, Oberoi Rajvilas, Holiday Inn, and Taj Rambagh Palace. The selection of the hotels purely is as a sample and the objective is not to draw comparison between the respective hotel brands. The hotels are hereafter referred as H1, H2, H3, & H4. One of the major hotel brand Marriott was excluded from the study as the said hotel had webpage and social media handles specific to the Jaipur property, the strategy has its own advantages and limitations and will be discussed in the conclusion section.

IV. DATA ANALYSIS & FINDINGS

A. Webpage / Homepage

It was found that only 2 hotels had link on their official pages for all the four mentioned social media tools. Different hotels were found to be strong in using different social media tools.

B. Facebook

It was found that all the hotels had face book page and the links were duly placed on the website of all hotels under study. However, while searching on facebook, various similar pages pertaining to the hotels were also found.

The number of likes ranged from 150 thousand to 900 thousand this means that those many people liked the page and ideally would be receiving the updates as shown in Fig. 1.

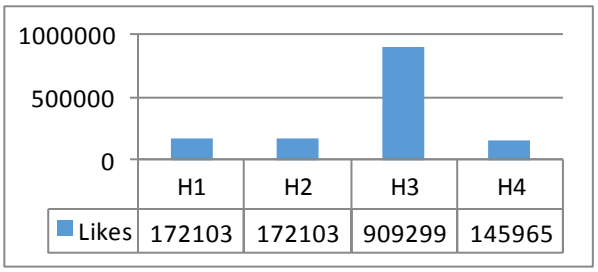

Fig. 1 Total No. of Likes on Facebook Page

Data was collected about recent posts created by the hotels in last 3 months and it was found was found that all hotels showed their interest in marketing through facebook media.

Although H4 (Fig. 2) ranked highest amongst the sample in terms of no. of posts. It was found that other hotels have less numbers of posts per month (less than one or two post per day and averaging to less than 20 post per hotels).

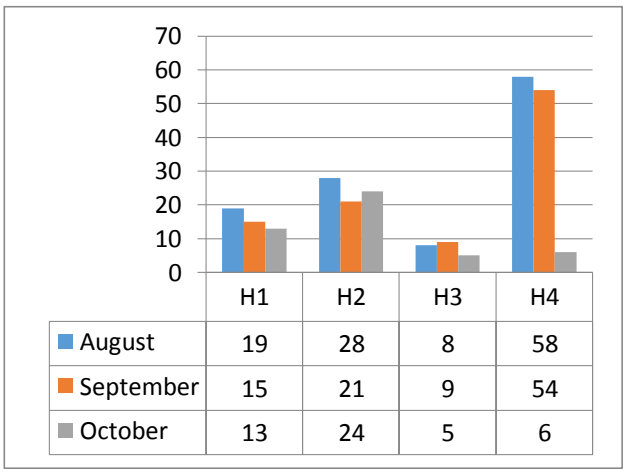

Fig. 2 No. of Posts

As far as the like on posts are concerned, the number of likes were higher in case of H3 but at the same time they had negligible posts in the month of Sept. and Oct. (fig. 3). This may be inferred that either guest are not

visiting the page, or the content being posted fails to engage the guest the way it should have had.

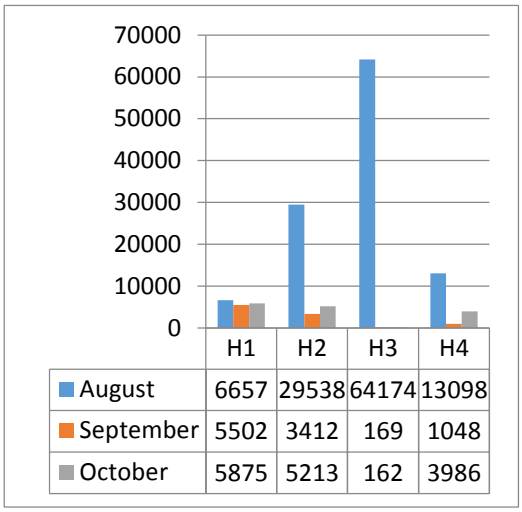

Fig. 3 No. of Likes on Posts

Looking at the number of comments by the guest and re-comments by hotels, it is evident that these numbers are far below the likely number in case of H4 in comparison to the no. of posts they had (fig. 4). This again strengthens the inference that the content is not engaging and therefore guest are not enticed to comment and share such posts. These posts were mostly 'speaking' and were not 'listening' or 'engaging' guest.

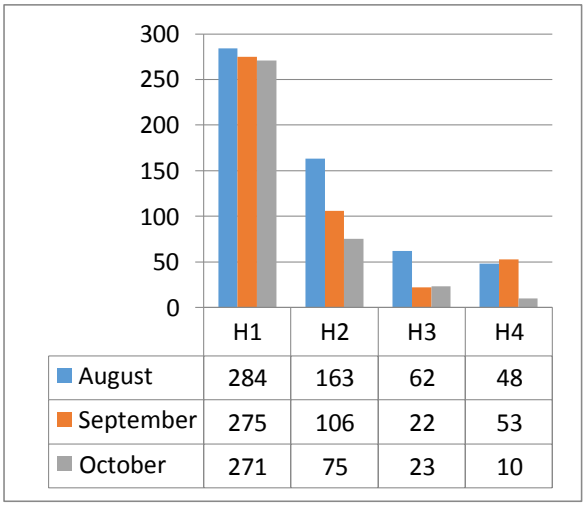

Fig. 4 No. of Comments

C. Twitter

While going through the twitter page it was observed that all hotels have their accounts on twitter. The number of followers and total number of tweets made by these hotels were also on the lower side in case of most of the hotels under study except H1 (Fig. 5).

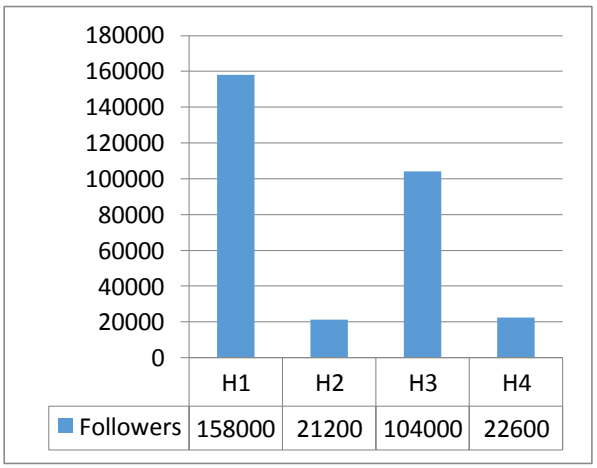

Fig. 5 No. of Followers

While going through the data regarding the number of tweets by hotels in past three months, it was seen that the average tweets per month per hotels is as low as 10 to 50.

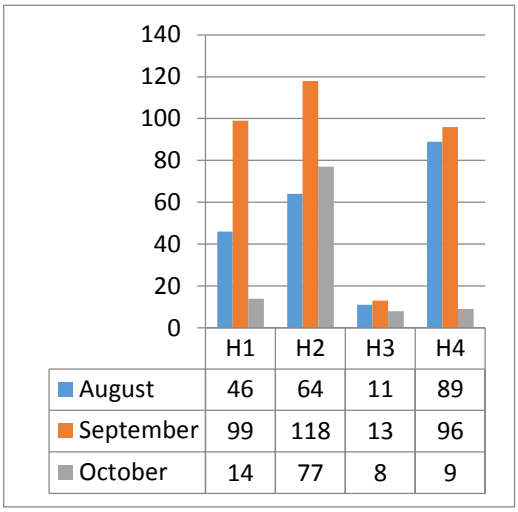

Fig. 6 No. of Tweets

The data for guest engagement as measured by likes seems fairly good except in case of H3 (fig. 7). It was found that the hotel tweets were engaging by encouraging guest to reply, getting them 'hooked' by posting puzzles, interesting questions.

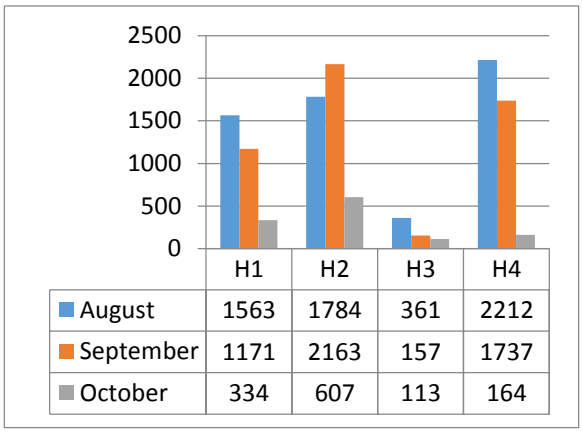

Fig. 7 Likes on Tweets

Some hotels were not seen replying to the guest query and suggestions there by showing low level of listening, relationship, and engaging dimension (Fig. 8).

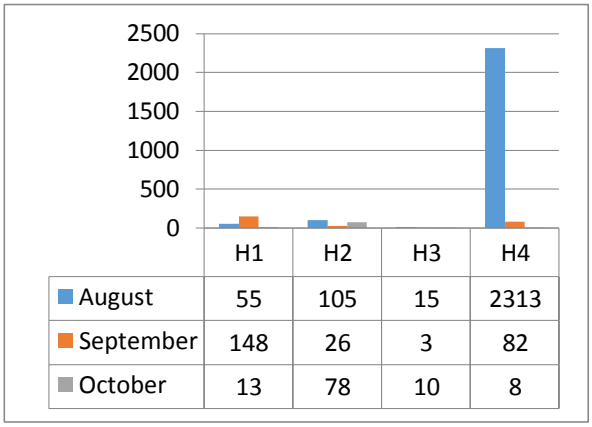

Fig. 8 No. of Replies

D. YouTube

It was observed that all the hotels do not have YouTube link on their home page out of four only three hotels had their official you tube page. Holiday Inn did not mention the link on homepage and thus was excluded from the analysis. The official page subscriber ranged from 2200 to 3200 (Fig. 9).

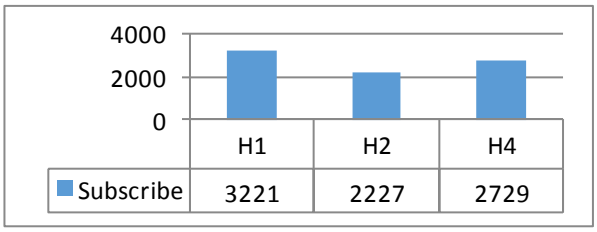

Fig. 9 No. of Subscribers

The total number of videos uploaded by the hotel also varied greatly and ranged from 4 to 12 per month (Fig. 10).

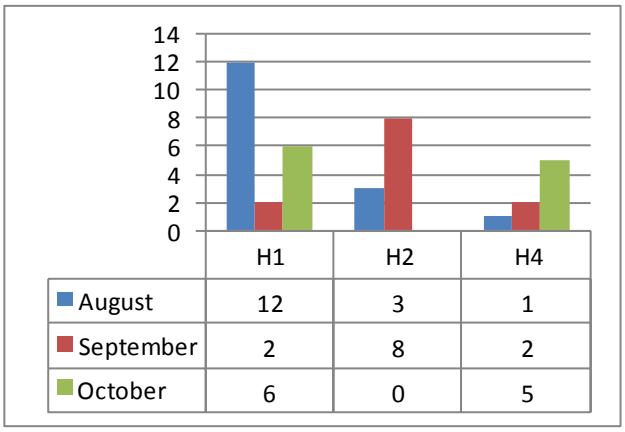

Fig. 10 No. of Videos Uploaded

It was observed that there is low correlation on number of views with the number of videos uploaded and low with the number of subscribers.

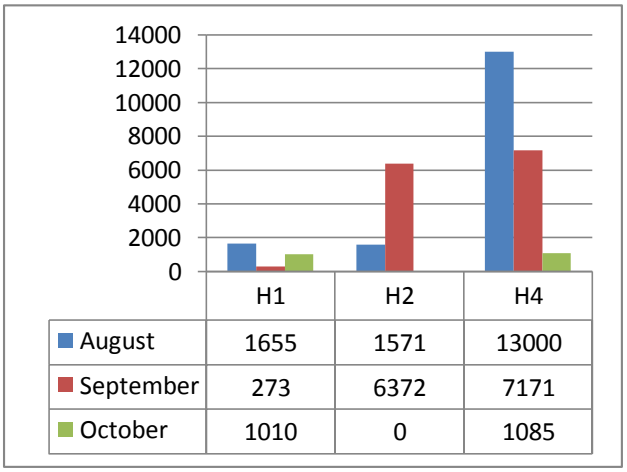

Fig. 11 No. of Views

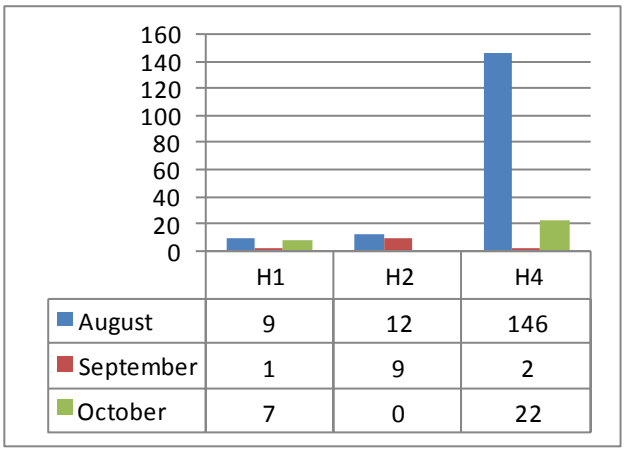

Fig. 12 No. of Likes

So, it may be inferred that the total viewership and subscription is not dependent on the number of videos being uploaded, but on the content that is available for viewing. The hotel with highest number of views and likes had relatively low number of uploads highlighting the fact that the content was more current, interesting and exciting as compared to others.

E. Instagram

Hotels have good following on Instagram that means people know about hotel which page on Instagram and it is good for their business as more and more people will know about their hotel and will have good business. Two Hotels viz Oberoi Rajvilas and Holiday Inn were not found to be using Instagram from the sample of 4 Hotels, least they have not placed a link for the same on their homepage.

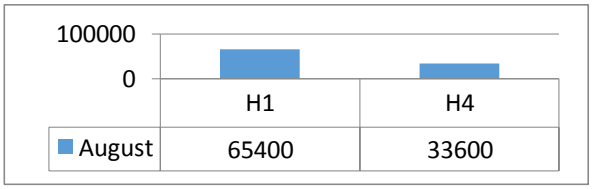

Fig. 13 No. of Followers on Instagram

Hotels have good followers on their page and are doing pretty good although the number of posts varied across the hotels signifying the regularity in terms of posting on the said Social media tool (fig. 13).

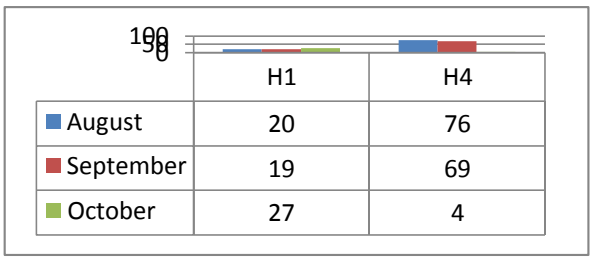

Fig. 14 No. of Posts on Instagram

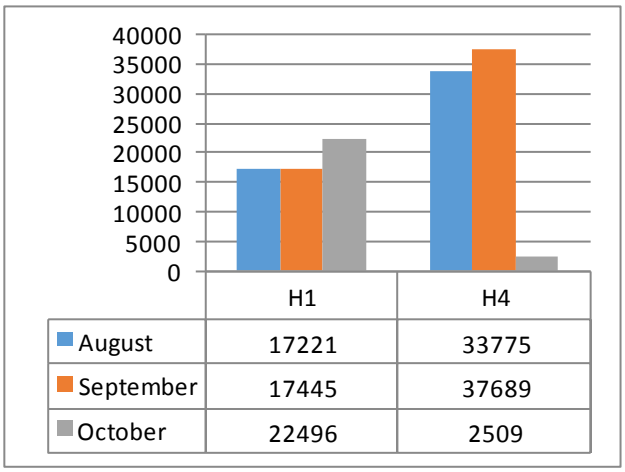

Fig. 15 No. of likes on Instagram

When it comes on comment no hotel is able to get as many comment as they require.

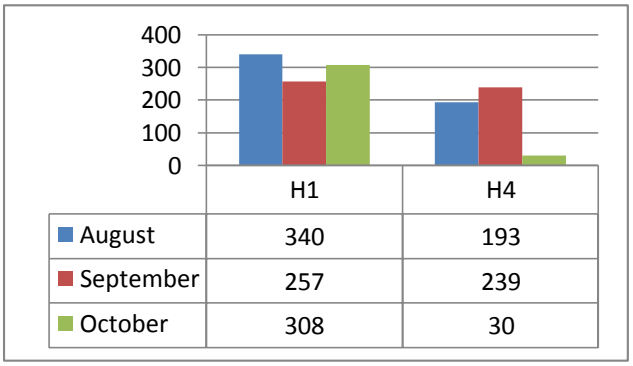

Fig. 16 No. of Comments on Instagram

V. CONCLUSIONS

A well-planned and strategically aligned social media presence can help a hotel to increase their guest, and build a relationship full of trust and openness with them. The data collected for the study reveals that while most hotels have their presence on social media, but they fail to utilize the full potential of all the options of social media and effectively engage with the target guest. Also, it was seen that there was presence of a secondary and at times multiple, more active and updated unofficial social media pages for the same hotel. So, hotels need to take this more seriously and keep on updating their social media page and update their home page if social media link has changed. They also need to keep a vigil on the type and number of similar/related pages available and manage them effectively so as to

reduce the confusion and miss-communication. It was further observed that the communication through social media channels was more of information sharing rather than engaging and creating brand or relationship. Strategy to have different social media pages for different properties of same brand/group need to be debated and further explored as on one side it facilitates more direct communication pertaining to a specific properties on other side it reduces and customer reach and sharing the very purpose of using Social media.

REFERENCES

(Arranged in the order of citation in the same fashion as the case of Footnotes.)

[1] The Pew Research Centre Website. "Social Networking Fact Sheet". <http://www.pewinternet.org/fact-sheets/social-networking-fact-sheet>.

[2] Cooper, B.B. "The Fastcompany Website". 10 Surprising Social Media Statistics That Will Make You Rethink Your Social Strategy. <http://www.fastcompany.com/3021749/work-smart/10-surprising-social-media-statistics-that-will-make-you-rethink-your-social-strategy>.

[3] Garrido-Moreno, A. and Lockett, N. (2016). "Social Media Use in European Hotels: Benefits and Main Challenges". El uso herramientas Soc. Media en Hotel. Eur. Princ. retos, oportunidades y dificultades., Vol. 12, No. 1, pp. 172-179.

[4] Leung, X.Y., Bai, B., and Stahura, K.A. (2015). "The Marketing Effectiveness of Social Media in the Hotel Industry: a Comparison of Facebook and Twitter". J. Hosp. Tour. Res., Vol. 39, No. 2, pp. 147-169.

[5] de Rosario, A.H., del Mar Gálvez Rodríguez, M., and del Carmen Caba Pérez, M. (2013). "Development of social media and web 2.0 in the top hotel chains". O Desenvolv. redes sociais e web 2.0 nas cadeias Hotel. topo., Vol. 9, No. 1, pp. 13-19.

[6] Tatar, Ş. and Eren-Erdoğmuş, İ. (2016). "The effect of social media marketing on brand trust and brand loyalty for hotels". Inf. Technol. Tour., Vol. 16, No. 3, pp. 249-263.

[7] Mizrachi, I. and Sellitto, C. (2015). "Building a Facebook Strategy: Some Insights from Australian Accommodation Small Tourism Enterprises (STEs)". J. Qual. Assur. Hosp. Tour., Vol. 16, No. 1, pp. 63-79.

[8] Chan, N.L. and Guillet, B.D. (2011). "Investigation of Social Media Marketing: How Does the Hotel Industry in Hong Kong Perform in Marketing on Social Media Websites?". J. Travel Tour. Mark., Vol. 28, No. 4, pp. 345-368.

[9] Leung, X.Y. and Tanford, S. (2016). "What Drives Facebook Fans to 'Like' Hotel Pages: a Comparison of Three Competing Models". J. Hosp. Mark. Manag., Vol. 25, No. 3, pp. 314-345.

[10] Denizci Guillet, B., Kucukusta, D., and (Lucy) Liu, L. (2016). "An Examination of Social Media Marketing in China: How do the Top 133 Hotel Brands Perform on the Top Four Chinese Social Media Sites?". J. Travel Tour. Mark., Vol. 33, No. 6, pp. 783-805.

[11] Berezan, O., Raab, C., Tanford, S., and Kim, Y.S. (2013). "Evaluating Loyalty Constructs Among Hotel Reward Program Members Using eWOM". J. Hosp. Tour. Res., Vol. 39, No. 2, pp. 198-224.

[12] Aluri, A., Slevitch, L., and Larzelere, R. (2015). "The effectiveness of embedded social media on hotel websites and the importance of social interactions and return on engagement". Int. J. Contemp. Hosp. Manag., Vol. 27, No. 4, pp. 670-689.

[13] Aluri, A., Slevitch, L., and Larzelere, R. (2016). "The Influence of Embedded Social Media Channels on Travelers' Gratifications, Satisfaction, and Purchase Intentions". Cornell Hosp. Q., Vol. 57, No. 3, pp. 250-267.

[14] Sanliöz Özgen, H.K. and Kozak, M. (2015). "Social media practices applied by city hotels: a comparative case study

from Turkey". Worldw. Hosp. Tour. Themes, Vol. 7, No. 3, pp. 229-241.

[15] Bonsón, E., Bednárová, M., and Wei, S. (2016). "Corporate twitter use and stakeholder engagement: an empirical analysis of the Spanish hotel industry". Eur. J. Tour. Res., Vol. 13, pp. 69-83.

[16] (Cindy) Choi, E.K., Fowler, D., Goh, B., and (Jessica) Yuan, J. (2016). "Social Media Marketing: Applying the Uses and Gratifications Theory in the Hotel Industry". J. Hosp. Mark. Manag., Vol. 25, No. 7, pp. 771-796.