

The Use of Social Media in Destination Marketing: A Case Study on Bangladesh Parjatan Corporation

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Abstract:

The application of social media by the National Tourism Organizations (NTOs) has seen a significant growth over the past few years. In Bangladesh, the National Tourism Organization (NTO) of Bangladesh Parjatan Corporation (BPC) also employs some social media strategies. As, this study intends to focus on the use of social media by the Bangladesh Parjatan Corporation and their strategies of using social media in destination marketing, 30 employees of BPC have been selected applying the non-probability judgmental sampling technique. Through the use of interviews, the author has examined the two social media applications, Facebook and Twitter used by Bangladesh Parjatan Corporation (BPC) and the strategies implemented by BPC in terms of its social media applications for destination marketing. Finally, the implications of these findings are discussed and some recommendations have been made for the chosen entity.

Keywords: Social Media, Destination Marketing

Jel Classification: M31

1. Introduction

In today's world of digitalization, internet has an essential impact on destination marketing as the real business behind travel is information (Pollock, 1995). The easy access to information about amenities and events can be a critical component of a destination's success and visitor satisfactions, as suggested by Sheldon (1993).

Tourists require information that can help them in the selection of tourist destinations, during the process of travel planning and decision making. Social media play a significant role especially important for tourism, which is an information-intensive activity (Gretzel, Yuan & Fesenmaier, 2000; Wang, Quaehee, & Fesenmaier, 2002). References are particularly important in the context of tourism due the intangibility of tourism products (Popesku, 2014). Social media thus has become the *modus operandi* of the 21st century as stated by Lange-Faria & Elliot (2012) to provide this platform of trust.

According to Alizadeh & Isa (2014), social media now-a-days can provide a platform of communication and interaction for customers and businesses. Tourism organizations can utilize the opportunities offered by social media to grow their relationship with their customers and develop networks. Despite having a number of studies focusing on use of social media in the tourism sector, majority attempted descriptive analysis of users mainly focusing on the psychological aspect of social media and less on the use of social media by the businesses (Alizadeh & Isa, 2014). Also, studies have rarely focused on the use of social media by NTOs in developing countries, like Bangladesh.

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This study thus aims at understanding the current use of social media in destination marketing in Bangladesh at the national level. Specifically, it focuses on identifying the use of social media and the strategies implemented by Bangladesh Parjatan Corporation, the National Tourism Organization (NTO) as a tool of destination marketing.

2. Objectives

The overall objective of the study is to have an understanding of the current use of social media by the National Tourism Organization (NTO) of Bangladesh, Bangladesh Parjatan Corporation for the purpose of for destination marketing.

The specific objectives are as follows:

- i) To identify the social media applications used by Bangladesh Parjatan Corporation (BPC)
- ii) To find the activities performed by Bangladesh Parjatan Corporation using the social media platforms
- iii) To determine the social media strategies implemented by Bangladesh Parjatan Corporation (BPC)
- iv) To identify the strategic use of Facebook by Bangladesh Parjatan Corporation (BPC) and
- v) To recommend some policies regarding the use of social media by Bangladesh Parjatan Corporation (BPC)

3. Literature Review

3.1 Concept of Social Media

In the era of information technology boom, travelers heavily rely on the internet for accessing information, to plan and book their trip, and to share their travel experiences (Buhalis & Law, 2008; Senecal & Nantel, 2004; Xiang & Gretzel, 2010). A significant development in the evolution of the internet, as suggested by Boyd & Ellison (2008) is the increasing popularity of social media platforms enabling internet users to collaborate, communicate and publish original content such as blogs, videos, wikis, reviews, or photos. Different terms have been used to define social media in literature and been used by authors including *social media*, *user-generated content* (UGC), *consumer generated media* (CGM), *online social networks* (OSN), *social networking sites* (SNS), *Web 2.0* and *Travel 2.0* (Lange-Faria & Elliot, 2012).

From the recent researches, Kaplan & Haenlein (2010) have been influential in shaping the terms consumer generated media and social media. According to Kaplan & Haenlein (2010), "social media is a set of internet-based applications that utilize Web 2.0 as its ideological and technological platform for evolution and that which enable users to create and exchange user-generated content". More simply, social media refers to internet applications such as Facebook and Twitter that allow their users to create, share and consume Consumer-Generated content (Lange-Faria & Elliot, 2012).

3.2 Typology of Social Media

Many researchers have attempted to identify and categorize social media, since its very advent (Constantinides, 2009; Fischer & Reuber, 2011; Fotis, Rossides & Buhalis, 2010; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; W. Kim, Jeong & Lee, 2010; Mangold & Faulds, 2009; Safko, 2012; Xiang & Gretzel, 2010), indicating different opinions over social media taxonomy. For example, six types of social media have been identified by Kaplan & Haenlein (2010): blogs, social networking sites (e.g. Facebook), virtual social worlds (e.g. Second Life), collaborative projects (e.g. Wikipedia), content communities (e.g. YouTube), and virtual game worlds (e.g. World of Warcraft), as identified by Alizadeh & Isa (2014). But this typology overlooks some types of social media such as microblogging (e.g. Twitter).

Another typology identified by Fotis, Rossides & Buhalis (2010) includes four domains: expressing, networking, sharing, and gaming. 1 summarizes the categories of social media with their definitions and example for each category based on the works of Fulkerson (2010), Safko (2012) and the categorization of social media by Overdrive Interactive (2013).

Table 1: A brief Typology of Social Media

Social Media Category	Description	Example
Social Networks	Focuses on building relationships among people with similar interests and activities.	Facebook
International Social Networks	This type of social media site is growing in popularity as the world wide web seeks to become more personal.	VK
Social Travel Networks	Allows travelers to exchange tips with each other before, during and after the trip.	Tripadvisor
Private Social Networks	Allows users to create their own private social networks.	Ning
Professional Social Networks	This type of social media site enables business professionals to recommend one another, share information about industry-related events, post resumes, and other features.	Linkedin
Social Recruiting	The process of sourcing or recruiting candidates through the use of social platforms as promotional and/or advertising channels, or Talent databases using search solutions by employers and recruiters.	Indeed
Blogging	Discussion or informational sites published on the World Wide Web.	Tumblr
Microblogging	Differs from traditional blogging as the content is delivered in short bursts of information.	Twitter
Blog Networks	Blog networks are usually a large collection of blogs. Many blog networks provide exclusive content and require approval for bloggers to join, which gives those who are accepted a certain level of prestige.	Gawker
Blogging Communities	Broader than niche communities and not exclusive like blog networks, blogging communities encourage bloggers to share and interact with one another as well as create regular blog posts.	BlogHer (continued)
Comment Communities	Blog comments that have hopped aboard the social media bandwagon to create their own domain of communities.	Disqus
Lifecasting	Continual broadcast of events in a person’s life through digital media.	Livestream

Social Media Category	Description	Example
Podcasting	Social networks that help connect podcasters, advertisers and listeners.	iTunes
Social Music Networks	Allows users to listen and share music with others.	Spotify
Photo Sharing	Users can upload and comment on photos.	Pinterest
Video Sharing	Users can upload and comment on videos.	YouTube
Document sharing	Users can upload and share documents.	Scribd
Virtual Worlds	Computer-based simulated environment where the users take the form of avatars visible to others.	Active Worlds
Social Search	Some search engines have evolved beyond providing search results into to a social media community where users can create profiles and interact.	Google blog search
Social Bookmarking & Sharing/Aggregators	Allows users to share, organize, and search bookmarks of web resources for easy access.	Digg
RSS	An acronym for Rich Site Summary. Tools in this category automatically feed you current content from the websites that are most critical to your business needs.	Atom
Social Q&A	Users can submit or answer questions.	WikiAnswers
Wikis/Content-driven Communities	Usually web applications which allow people to add, modify, or delete content in collaboration with others.	Wikipedia
Niche Communities	Niche networking has grown beyond the message boards of old into full-fledged communities.	Car Community
Product/Company Reviews	Allows reviews to be posted about businesses, products, or services.	Yelp
Social Commerce	Allows social interaction and user contributions to assist in the online buying and selling of products and services.	Groupon
E-Commerce	Platforms Enables individuals and businesses to create online stores.	Shoppify
Management & Measurement	Provides social media marketing tools and analytics.	SocialEye
Productivity Applications	A catch-all category, they enhance business productivity in one way or another.	Google Docs
Mobile	The intersection of mobile communications and social media including tools that make mobile phones more powerful business allies.	airG
Interpersonal	Tools that facilitate people-to-people communication and collaboration.	Skype
Other social media sites	Social media sites that defy definitions.	Squidoo

Source: Fulkerson (2010), Safko (2012), Overdrive Interactive (2013)

3.3 Tourism and Social Media

Many literatures have been found integrating the concepts of tourism and technological progresses together. The information technology is creating challenges, as destination images are no longer solely controlled by tourism providers (Hays, Page & Buhalis, 2013). These alternative platforms have so widespread influence that now-a-days they may even undermine the authority of traditional destination marketing organizations (DMOs) or conventional advertisements (Gretzel, 2006; Gretzel, Yuan, & Fesenmaier, 2000; Rand, 2006). Nowadays, the success or failure of tourism organizations is highly determined by the way social media has enabled customers as active participants in supply and circulation of the information (Tussyadiah & Zach, 2013) and in a process, destination marketers need to recognize the reasons and modes of participation in social media by travelers.

From the demand side, Chung & Buhalis (2008) have identified the functional, socio-psychological and hedonic benefits, as important factors for the travelers. More reasons for using social media among travelers are: influence of shared experiences on social media on travelers’ decision making process (Fotis, Rossides & Buhalis, 2012) and the scope of travelers to be story-tellers on a ‘24/7’ basis engaging them to the online community (Gretzel, Fesenmaier, & O’Leary, 2006). A similar approach has been attempted by Enter & Michopoulou (2013) found that, Facebook is preferred by travelers as the leading social networking site for its attributes of information search, trust and sharing of travel experience.

As suggested Gretzel, Fesenmaier & O’Leary (2006), travelers use social media in all phases of their trip. According to Fotis, Rossides & Buhalis (2012), “travelers use social media at three stages of trip (i.e. before, during and after the travel)” and argued that social media is mainly used in after the - trip phase to share experience with other travelers or friends. Moreover, social media is found to be usually used for information search about the destination before the trip and during the trip, to stay connected with friends (Fotis, Rossides & Buhalis, 2012).

NTOs mainly use social media from the supplier side, in order to provide and coordinate their information for consumers, focusing on building their brand through direct interaction with the consumer and immediate response to consumer feedbacks (Lange-Faria & Elliot, 2012). A criticism of NTOs as identified by Lange-Faria & Elliot (2012) is that the well-educated and tech-savvy travelers might find the positive points of a destination as overly biased. Literature shows that, different NTOs employ different strategies over the globe. Study conducted by Alizadeh & Isa (2014) reveals that VisitBritain heavily relies on its official Facebook page to manage Love UK, and perceives Twitter as a noise. Conversely, for the German National Tourist Board each message posted to Facebook is replicated on Twitter to maintain integration among multiple social media platforms (Alizadeh & Isa, 2014). Five dimensions have been identified by Alizadeh & Isa (2015), in their study in terms of NTOs using Facebook as a social media platform. These are:

Table 2: Five Dimensions of Using Facebook by NTOs

Dimensions	Main Ideas
Identifiability	Examines whether the NTOs Facebook pages can be easily recognized by users when they use Facebook internal search to find NTOs
Attitude towards User Participation	Identifies whether NTOs allow users to post on their Facebook timeline or the participation is limited to likes, comments and shares of admin posts
Customization	Focuses on whether NTOs provide content in different languages
Information Availability	Ensures that NTOs should provide their mission statement, community rules and description of their destinations through the Facebook pages.
Innovativeness	Determines how creative the NTOs are in terms of using Facebook

Source: Alizadeh & Isa (2015)

4. Methodology

Initially, this study has been done based on adopting certain exploratory research methods such as, secondary data analysis, literature review, and expert surveys. The further study has been carried out following the descriptive research design by collecting primary data using the survey method (Personal Interview). In particular, the reason for conducting personal interview as the survey method is the desire to obtain significant information from the sample (Brinberg and McGrath, 1985).

Both, secondary and primary data have been necessary, for the fulfillment of the research objectives. Secondary data has been collected from published documents from related books, various journals, newspapers, magazines, reports and the official pages of social networking sites, Facebook and Twitter of Bangladesh Parjatan Corporation (BPC). For getting primary data, employees of Bangladesh Parjatan Corporation have been interviewed personally through the depth interview method using both closed ended and open-ended structured questionnaire.

The sample selection at this stage has been done by following a non-probability convenience sampling technique to select the population elements according to the researchers' convenience (Malhotra, 2010). 30 concerned employees of Bangladesh Parjatan Corporation have been selected as sample for this study.

5. The Case of Bangladesh Parjatan Corporation

The Bangladesh Parjatan Corporation, popularly known as 'BPC' started its journey as an autonomous body under the 'Ministry of Civil Aviation and Tourism' in 1972 and serves as the National Tourism Organization (NTO) of Bangladesh. Though it was the only body of Government, accountable for tourism sector in the country, many commercial units of BPC have been handed over to the private sector under lease management agreement, after few years of its operation.

The main objective of Bangladesh Parjatan Corporation is to create a positive image of Bangladesh as one of the important tourist destinations over the world to expand the tourism sector of the country. In a process, it aims to develop and maintain international standard tourism products and augment marketing of tourism products at home and abroad ("Bangladesh Parjatan Corporation-Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh", 2018).

6. Results and Discussions

6.1 Social Media Platforms Used by Bangladesh Parjatan Corporation (BPC): This analysis provides an idea of the types of social media being used by Bangladesh Parjatan Corporation (BPC). Data analyses show that, Bangladesh Parjatan Corporation employs only two social media application, including a social networking site, *Facebook* and a micro-blogging, *Twitter* (Image 1 & 2, respectively). This is been suggested by Alizadeh & Isa (2014), as they concluded that, Asian countries have less use of social media application.

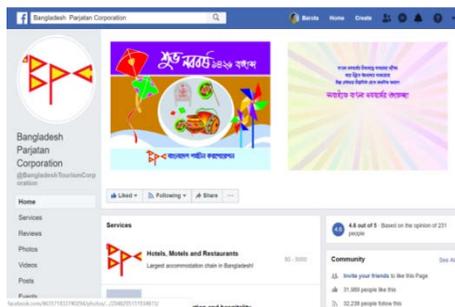


Image 1: Official Facebook Page of BPC
Source: <https://www.facebook.com/BangladeshTourismCorporation/>



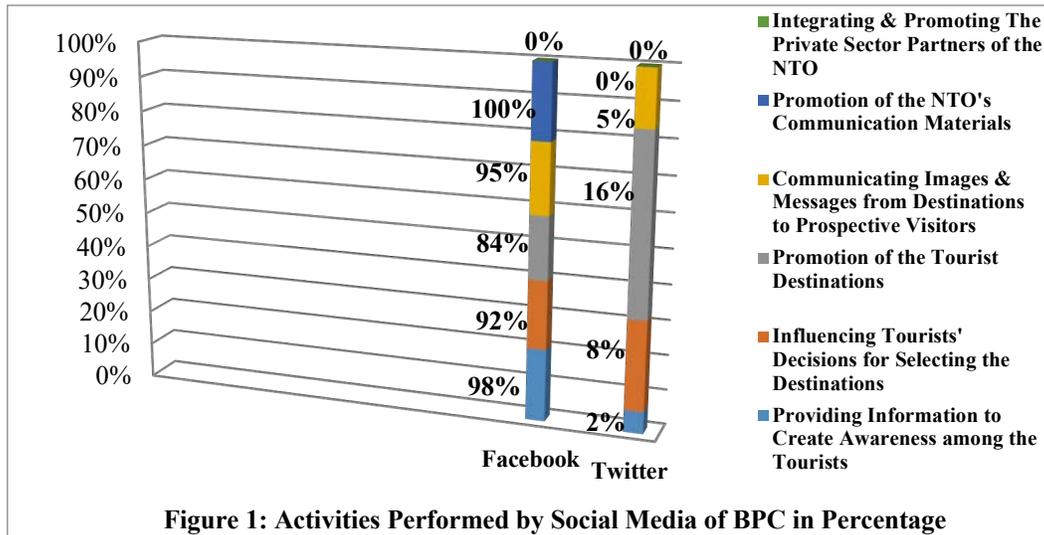
Image 2: Official Twitter Page of BPC
Source: "Parjatan Corporation @parjataninfo | Twitter", (2018)

6.2 Activities Performed by Bangladesh Parjatan Corporation Using the Social Media Platforms: This analysis provides an idea of the activities that Bangladesh Parjatan Corporation (BPC) does using its social media. Analyses of data show that, using Facebook and Twitter, BPC performs the activities including: i) providing information to create awareness among the domestic and foreign tourists of the destinations, ii) influencing tourists' decisions for selecting the destinations, iii) promotion of the tourist destinations, iv) communicating images and messages from destinations to prospective visitors, v) promotion of the NTO's communication materials and vi) integrating and promoting the private sector partners of the NTO.

Figure 1 indicates that, according to the respondents, there are differences in the activities performed by the two social media platforms, *Facebook* and *Twitter*. Analyses show that, 98% of the respondents think that, the *Facebook* page of BPC provides information to the domestic and foreign tourists and contribute to creating awareness of the destinations among them, whereas, the verified *Twitter* page of BPC rarely does this job, as indicated by only 2% of the respondents.

Majority of the respondents (92%), also find that *Facebook* contributes strongly to influence tourists' decisions for selecting Bangladesh as a destination, while, 8% respondents find that, the *Twitter* page also does so. In terms of promotion of the tourist destinations, 84% of BPC's employees find *Facebook* as an active platform, but, 16% also think that, the *Twitter* page of BPC also promotes Bangladesh as a destination.

According to *Figure 1*, it is also evident that, *Facebook* is found to be an active platform for communicating images and messages from destinations to prospective visitors by 95% of BPC's employees, while, only 5% think that *Twitter* does so. All the respondents (100%) think that, BPC can promote its various communication materials, such as, advertising, public relations activities and printed materials through *Facebook*, but, it cannot do such kind of activities using *Twitter*. Also, very interestingly, none of the respondents think that, BPC is integrating and promoting its private sector partners, through its social media, *Facebook* and *Twitter*.



6.3 Social Media Strategies Implemented by Bangladesh Parjatan Corporation (BPC):

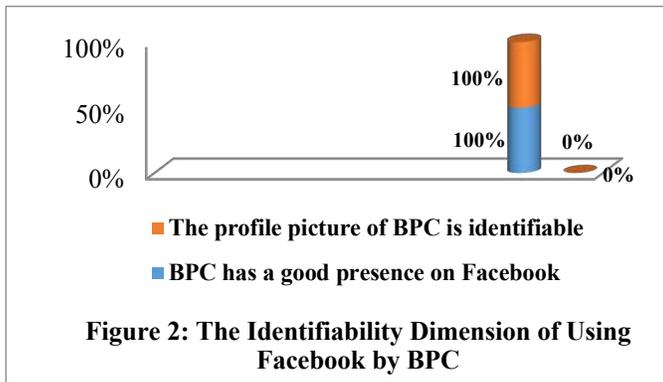
This section discusses about the strategies implemented by BPC in terms of their social media. To analyze their strategies, emphasis is given on aspects suggested by Alizadeh & Isa (2014), such as - *the language of communication, distribution of date BPC joined the social media, type of presence on social media, number of fan base and community involvement of BPC in social media* are assessed.

According to Alizadeh & Isa (2014), “most NTOs use English as the only language to communicate with their users on Facebook pages and use native languages for Twitter in comparison to Facebook”. Data analyses show that, for Bangladesh Parjatan Corporation, English is used in both *Facebook* and *Twitter* as a language to communication. Additionally, the Facebook page is found to be using Bengali, the mother tongue of Bangladesh for a certain posts. Though the use of Bengali language is done to ensure the audience involvement, the number of audience involved is quite low. As suggested by Alizadeh & Isa (2014), most NTOs prefer Facebook as the preferred social media for promoting their destinations to international travelers. Review of literature shows that Jamaica is the first NTO to join Facebook on November, 2007, whereas, Czech Republic is the latest that joined Facebook on November, 2013 (Alizadeh & Isa, 2014). According to analyses of data, BPC started its Facebook page much later in the year 2013 and joined Twitter on June, 2016.

However, according to Kaplan and Haenlein (2010), a successful social media presence depends on being active and engaging to customers, rather than, being present in numerous social media sites. As suggested by Alizadeh & Isa (2014), the number of fans involved in a Facebook page or average number of fans or synonymous to number of — “likes” (Facebook, 2013) determines its effectiveness. Data shows that, BPC has only 31,991 *likes* and 32,240 *followers* on its Facebook page. Though the number has increased from the previous years, still, it is quite a small number in terms of community involvement. So, it can be said that, BPC has a manageable number of fan base and community involvement,

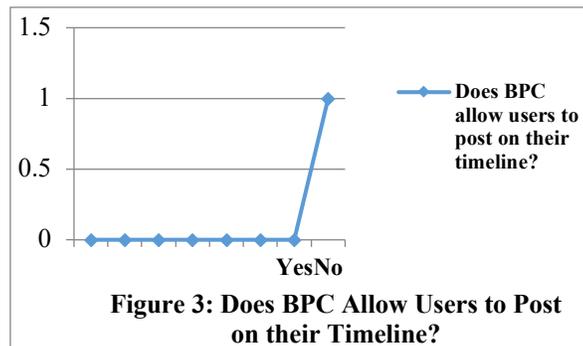
as it is argued by Eyl (2013) & Socialbakers (2013) that, involving fan base becomes more difficult with growing number of fans. BPC on the other hand, has made only 1 tweet through its page and as a result, has only 862 *followers* and 141 *likes*, which indicates to a very weak fan base and community involvement.

6.4 The Strategic Use of Facebook by BPC: This section discusses about the strategic use of Facebook by BPC focusing on five dimensions: *identifiability, attitude towards user participation, customization, information availability* and *innovativeness* of NTOs for using Facebook (Alizadeh & Isa, 2015).

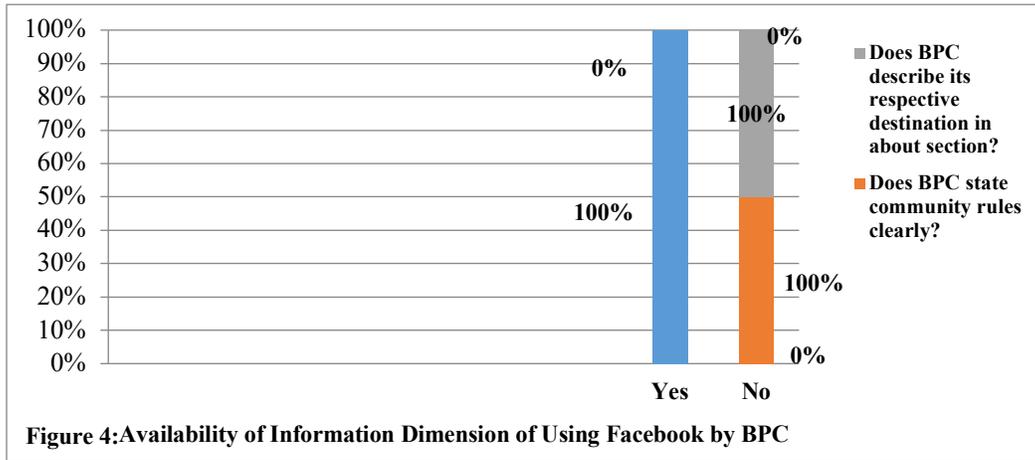


Analyses denote that, the Facebook page of BPC is easily identifiable. *Figure 2* shows that, all the respondents find that, BPC has a good presence on Facebook and the profile picture on BPC’s Facebook page makes it identifiable, as the page uses the logo of BPC.

According to Facebook (2011), “timeline is the heart of a Facebook page where people can update their status and upload various kinds of contents such as photos and videos”. In Facebook, users can turn on or off the ability of other people to post on one’s page. As argued by Alizadeh & Isa (2014), Facebook pages should encourage people to dialogue. But, data shows that, BPC only lets its users to give likes on the posts and page reviews, instead of letting them post on the wall (*Figure 3*). So it can be said that, the Facebook page of BPC lacks of an interactive attitude toward its users.



According to Alizadeh & Isa (2015), “global pages on Facebook can redirect their users to the best version of their page, customized according to the country the users are in; thereby providing their users with localized content (e.g. localized cover photos, profile photos, about section and news feed)”. From data analyses, it is evident that, BPC operates through a single Facebook page where it uses English as the main language, and use Bengali as the local language for some posts, such as – cover photos, profile pictures and section of news feed. So, it can be conferred that, BPC’s Facebook page practices *level of customization* in terms of providing content in different languages.



As suggested by Chung & Buhalis (2008), the main reasons that users join Facebook are to search for information they need. So, it is important for NTOs to provide essential information in their pages. By essential information, Alizadeh & Isa (2015) identified that NTOs should provide their mission statement, community rules and description of their destinations through the Facebook pages. Analyses of data indicate that, the Facebook page of BPC lacks in the availability of information dimension to its users, as it only contains detail information regarding its missions (*Figure 4*). The page does not state any details regarding its community involvement and the community rules. *Figure 4* also shows that, according to all the respondents (100%), there is no description of the destinations in the Facebook page. Many other NTOs, such as Dominica’s page has a description: “Dominica - The Nature Island is filled with lush green rainforests, cascading waterfalls, friendly Indigenous people, largest Boiling lake, natural spas and exciting rhythms” (Alizadeh & Isa, 2015).

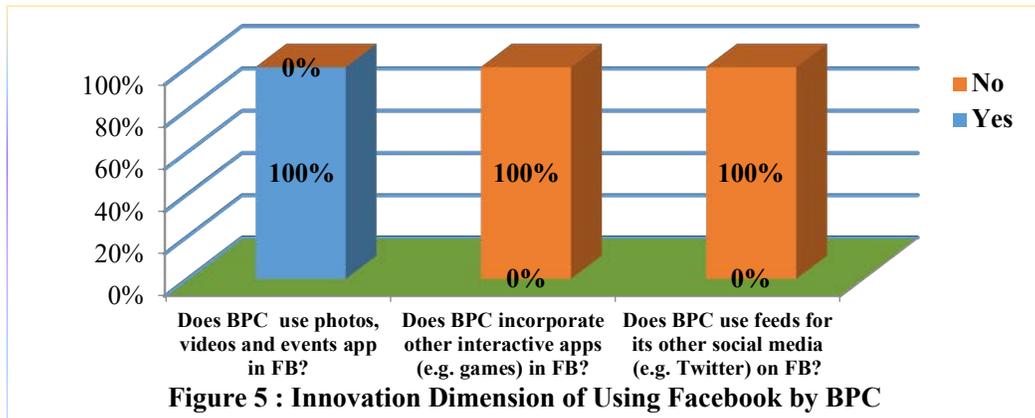


Figure 5 shows that, all the respondents (100%) think that, the Facebook page of BPC uses photos, videos and events app. The page contains photos and videos of the several initiatives taken by BPC.

It also contains its various events lists and links, including, Newsletter Inauguration Day, Victory Day Observation, Chakay Chorey Dhakaye Boishakhi Khabar, World Tourism Day, 2013 (Seminar), World Tourism Day, 2013 (Rally) and World Tourism Day, 2013 (Photo Exhibitions). Interestingly, the page does not include any updated events of BPC.

A study conducted by Alizadeh & Isa (2014) reveals that many destinations are unable to creatively engage their customers, in terms of using unique Facebook features, such as interactive maps, games and contests, in pages (Alizadeh & Isa, 2015). According to data analyses, all the respondents (100%) think that, BPC neither incorporates feeds for any of its other social media applications, (e.g. Twitter feed) nor it uses any kind of interactive apps in Facebook (e.g. interactive games or edutainment materials) to attract new users and maintain the current users. So, it can be concluded that, BPC still needs to incorporate innovative features to its Facebook page, in order to make its page more attractive to the current and potential users.

7. Recommendations and Conclusion

By analyzing the use of social media by Bangladesh Parjatan Corporation, some recommendations can be made. These are mentioned below:

- It is strongly advised to BPC that it should be involved with other social media platforms, such as, YouTube.
- As BPC is operating through only two social media applications, providing users with adequate information about the destinations and events and also offering timely responses to their feedbacks, can at least contribute to the process of destination marketing.
- The Facebook page should be replicated on Twitter to maintain integration among its multiple social media platforms.
- It should also allow the visitors to post on the timeline of Facebook page and mention the community rules, in order to ensure the community involvement.
- Developing and implementing innovative and interesting content, like interactive applications and edutainment related materials on Facebook can improve their performance in attracting the current and potential users and
- BPC must incorporate its numerous industry suppliers and partners on the social media in order to deliver the tourism product to the visitors.

So, the central theme of this topic is to establish the fact that, Government should pay essential attention to this matter to allocate adequate resources for the NTO in order to provide this growing sector a rise. In conclusion, it can be stated that, despite being the NTO of Bangladesh, BPC is found to be a very limited user of social media. Also, it is found to be unaware of potential and opportunity provided by social media and as a result, is still lagging behind in attracting new users and community involvement. The central challenge to this phenomenon is the minimum resources and lack of integration of their activities with the digitization process.

8. Limitations & Future Scope of the Study

The present study is limited by the fact that, the study is conducted only to identify the social medias used and the strategies been applied by Bangladesh Parjatan Corporation. All of this information has provided a very narrow, but, basic scenario of the use of social media by BPC for destination marketing purpose. A comparison with some other NTOs would have added much value to the study. To have an intricate picture of the whole issue, other relevant studies must be conducted.

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