Visitor's impact on destination image: Using visitor-generated content (VGC) through mobile technologies as a tool for sustainable collaborative communication.

Authors: *Zoe Dunne and Dr James Hanrahan (IT Sligo).*

The role played by a tourist destinations image in the process of decision-making and choice is significant. (Frais, et al. 2011; Beerli and Martin, 2004; Chen and Kerstetter, 1999; Baloglu and McCleary, 1999a; Milman and Pizam, 1995; Woodside and Lyonski, 1989). However there is currently very little International information linking online visitor generated content (VGC), mobile technologies and Destination Image, and there has been no related published research within the Irish context. Armano (2010) outlines that content found online in relation to a destination can be owned, earned, paid or shared content such as VGC. The Internet comprises of various types of web platforms that can be classified into organic, induced, or autonomous information sources (Llodrà-Riera et al. 2015). Destination image is categorized by Hyun & O'Keefe (2012) as *Organic Image*, *Induced Image* and *Actual experience.* Technology needs to be the key instrument to innovate and enhance co-creation of the tourist experience, and thereby create richer experiences and add value for the consumer (Govers 2002). This research will focus on social and cultural representations of destinations as represented through VGC on e-platforms using mobile technology. Online platforms currently available to travelers will be assessed and critical success factors identified. The focus of this research will be on VGC and how it is utilized before, during and after visiting a destination. It will identify what factors motivate visitors to create digital content. A blended mixed method approach will be adopted for this postgraduate research. The primary method will rely on an exploratory study of VGC with quantitative and qualitative research methods, Utilizing a content analysis approach of tourist e-platforms and field research to identify current trends, patterns and emergent themes in context of international literature. A large representative sample of holidaymakers and national tourism businesses will accomplish this. The research will identify and assess domestic and international tourist's use of mobile technology in the context of VGC. The research will also identify motivations behind VGC and any potential barriers to using mobile technology as encountered by tourists such as availability of WIFI, roaming charges and reception. The data gathered will identify if there is a need to improve and develop technological e-platforms in terms of functionality for the tourism industry, and if so to make appropriate recommendations. The intent of this research is to contribute to new knowledge on the impact of VGC on Destination Image. It seeks to improve our understanding on the changing landscape of e-platforms due to the proliferation of mobile technologies. Furthermore, there is a gap in knowledge specific to VGC via mobile technologies and its impact on destination image. The research will bridge this gap by examining VGC such as images, reviews, blogs, podcasts etc. The research will generate baseline findings on visitor-generated content in an Irish context. VGC will play an increasing role in Destination Image with social and cultural representations of a destination being shaped by a collaborative online narrative.

Keywords: Destination Image, Mobile Technologies, Visitor Generated Content, Tourism Generated Content, User Generated Content, Content Analysis.

Introduction

There is a general consensus about the significance of a tourist destinations image in the process of decision-making and choice. (Frais, et al. 2011; Baloglu and McCleary, 1999a; Beerli and Martin, 2004; Chen and Kerstetter, 1999; Milman and Pizam, 1995; Woodside and Lyonski, 1989). The body

of literature establishes that the information sources that individuals are exposed to influence the formation of perceptions of a destination prior to visit (Frais, et al. 2011). Studies on the influence of word-of-mouth (WOM) communications have also existed for many decades (Tseng et al. 2014, Brown and Reingen, 1987 and Richins, 1983) and the importance of WOM on business has been widely discussed and researched, particularly since the worldwide adoption of Internet technologies revolutionized the distribution and influence of WOM (Ye at al 2010, Anderson, 1998, Goldenberg et al., 2001, Stokes and Lomax, 2002 and Zhu and Zhang, 2006). Tourism-influenced representations of destinations are an important component of the reputation and success of a destination, due to the effect of digital (electronic) WOM (Zhou, L 2014; Choi et al. 2007; Govers et al 2007; Reidl et al 2002). This research sets out to examine the impact of Visitor Generated Content (VGC) through mobile technologies on Irelands Destination Image, and how VGC can be harnessed through sustainable collaborative communication into the future. Online platforms currently available to travelers will be assessed and critical success factors identified. The focus of this research will be on VGC and how it is utilized before, during and after visiting a destination. It will identify what factors motivate visitors to create digital content.

VGC and Destination Image

There is currently very little International information linking VGC with Destination Image (Llodrà-Riera et al. 2015; Martínez et al. 2012; Munar, 2011) and there has been no related published research within the Irish context. Wayne et al. (2015) examine the evolution of image throughout the trip experience by using smartphone technology to record images and perceptions finding that Image fluctuates during the trip experience with arrival and departure scores having a strong impact on post trip evaluation. Armano (2010) outlines the type of content found online in relation to a destination. Owned content consists of tourism websites, apps and custom portals or pages such as tourism providers own online listings, blog, video or podcast. Paid Media refers to money exchanged for space online such as banner ads or endorsements. Earned Media can consist of reviews, articles, online TV and Radio. Finally shared media consists of content shared, and communities built on, third party social networks. Destination image is defined as 'an interactive system of thoughts, opinions, feelings, visualizations, and intentions towards a destination.' (Tasci et al. cited in Zhou et al. 2014) and categorized by Hyun & O'Keefe (2012) as:

- *Organic Image* – direct experience or non-touristic information. (eg. TV reports, documentation, or friends experiences).
- *Induced Image* – indirect experience, tourist info eg. Brochure, adds etc.
- *Actual experience* – unmediated interaction, visual, auditory, taste, smell and touch. (strongest influence)

Some previous studies (e.g., Beerli & Martin, 2004) have concluded that the Internet can influence the perceived image of a destination, and generally assumes that the Internet is an induced source. In contrast, Llodrà-Riera et al. (2015) suggests that the Internet comprises various types of web platforms that can be classified into organic, induced, or autonomous, in line with Gartner's (1993) classification of traditional, offline information sources.

Llodrà-Riera et al. (2015) demonstrate that VGC constitutes part of the information sources latent variable, and suggest it would be interesting to determine the precise weight that VGC exerts on each type of image (i.e., cognitive, affective, and unique). Similarly Munar (2011) makes recommendations for developing an analytical strategy to examine, select, classify, monitor, and evaluate content generated by travelers. According to Llodrà-Riera et al. (2015) such an analytical strategy has great potential to help marketing organizations understand destination image

formation processes and points to the suggestion by Martínez et al. (2012) that destination management systems may also work well, serving as a "mash-up" of content that already exist in the network while consolidating the destination offer by maintaining an integrative, flexible, professional collaboration among administrations, the private sector, customers, and residents.

Consumers now play an active part in co-creating their own experiences, (Govers et al. 2007, Stamboulis and Skayannisn, 2000). According to Govers (2002) technology needs to be the key instrument to innovate and enhance co-creation and thereby create richer experiences and add value for the consumer. Technology is becoming smaller, more portable, universal, wireless ready and more multi-functional with an increasing assortment of applications providing access to specialized information (McKay, K. and Vogt, C. 2012). Recent statistics from Fáilte Ireland (2012) identifies the following in relation to hotel bookings and mobile technology;

- 82% of mobile customers booked within 1 day of arrival

- 56% were within 20 miles of the hotel

- 35% within 1 mile of the hotel

A recent Google survey found that social networks influenced approximately 40% of peoples travel plans, while 50% based their travel plans on other people's reviews and experiences (Fáilte Ireland, 2013) concluding that consumers trust opinions from other users far more than they trust any other form of marketing message.

Method

This research will focus on social and cultural representations of destinations as represented through VGC via mobile technology. It will generate baseline findings on VGC in an Irish context. A mixed method approach adopting an exploratory study of VGC will rely on quantitative and qualitative research methods including content analysis of tourist e-platforms and field research to identify textual themes. In order to probe tourism stakeholders and examine impact of VGC via mobile technologies on Destination Image, a theoretical framework will be designed incorporating the major themes emerging from the literature. The research will identify and assess domestic and international tourist's use of mobile technology as portals to destinations when they travel in general and within Ireland. A large representative sample of holidaymakers and tourism businesses will accomplish this. The research will identify motivations behind VGC and any potential barriers to using mobile technology as encountered by tourists such as availability of WIFI, roaming charges and reception. The data gathered will identify if there is a need to improve and develop technological e-platforms in terms of functionality for the tourism industry, and if so to make appropriate recommendations. This will include identifying gaps between domestic and international tourists and across demographic groups, as well as through comparative analysis and gap identification between Ireland and other destinations. Travel providers will also be included in the research and surveying in order to understand their level of involvement with next generation technology applications, and how they can benefit regionally and based on sub sectors of the tourism industry. The research will therefore be utilising multiple methods (e.g.) in-depth interviews analysed using Nvivo, content and textual analysis of the VGC on tourist platforms such as Trip advisor, Air BnB etc. Again utilising Nvivo software to help manage the data and allow for coding of the data and the emergence of current themes within the data. Quantitative content analysis can involve assessing keywords in the context of their specific meaning in the text (Krippendorf, 2004) as well as frequency and intensity (Jennings, 2010; Sarantakos, 2005; Neuman, 2006) and visual materials (Mohammed, Guillet and Law, 2015; Vitouladiti, 2014; Muehlenhaus, 2011; Molloy and Fennell, 1998). One of the priorities of this research is to determine how technology is changing the way we choose, experience

and perceive destinations, the digital footprint we leave behind, and whether the technologies in place are being fully utilized and are helpful to visitors before, during and after travel.

Conclusion

The intent of this research is to contribute new knowledge on the impact of visitor generated content (VGC) on Destination Image, and to identify how VGC can be harnessed through sustainable collaborative communication into the future It also seeks to improve our understanding on the changing landscape of e-platforms due to the proliferation of mobile technologies. VGC will play an increasing role in Destination Image with social and cultural representations of a destination being shaped by a collaborative online narrative. The literature shows that while these changes have been taking place over the last twenty years, there is a gap in the research when it comes to VGC via evolving mobile technologies. The research will bridge this gap by identifying why tourists create content and how this content can affect Destination Image.

References

Akehurst, G. (2008) 'User generated content: the use of blogs for tourism organisations and tourism consumers' *Service Business* 3 (1) 51 - 61

Argyropoulou, A. et al. (201?) 'Tourist Destination Marketing and Management Using Advanced ICTs Technologies' *Advances on Information Processing and Management* 365 – 369

Armano (2010) *Digital Properties, Platforms & Media Landscape* [online image], available: http://darmano.typepad.com/logic_emotion/2010/09/community.html [accessed 14 Oct 2014]

Alptekin, GI and Buyukozkan, G. (2011) 'An integrated case-based reasoning and MCDM system for Web based tourism destination planning' *Expert Systems and Applications* 3 (2011) 2125 – 2132

Beerli, A., & Martín, J. D. (2004). Factors influencing destination image. Annals of Tourism Research, 26, 868e897.

Cox, N et al. (2014) 'Internal brand management of destination brands: Exploring the roles of destination management organisations and operators' *Journal of Destination Management and Marketing*, 3 (2) 85 – 95

Chon, KS (1990) 'The role of destination image in tourism: a review and discussion' *The Tourist Review* 45 (2) 2 – 9

Edensor, Tim (2012) 'Tourism and Performance', *The Sage Handbook of Tourism Studies,* 338.4791

Failte Ireland (2012), *Using Mobile Technology To Grow Your Business* [online], available: http://www.failteireland.ie/FailteIreland/media/WebsiteStructure/Documents/5_Training_Workshops/Using-mobile-tech-to-grow-your-business.pdf [accessed 22 Nov 2014]

Failte Ireland (2012), *Social Media and Travel; What Are The Trends* [online], available: http://www.failteireland.ie/News-Features/News-Library/Social-media-and-travel-what-are-the-trends.aspx#sthash.R5Y2ilS6.dpuf [accessed 22 Nov 2014]

Gallarza, MG. et al (2001) 'Destination Image: Towards a Conceptual Framework' *Annals of Tourism Research*, 29 (1) 56 – 78

Gartner, W. C. (1989). Tourism image: attribute measurement of state tourism

products using multidimensional

Girardin, F., Girardin, F., Calabrese, F., Fiore, F.D., Ratti, C. & Blat, J. 2008, "Digital Footprinting: Uncovering Tourists with User-Generated Content", IEEE Pervasive Computing, vol. 7, no. 4, pp. 36-43.

Govers, R. at al (2007) 'Virtual Destination Image: A New Measurement Approach' *Annals of Tourism Research*, 34 (4) 977 – 997

Govers, R and Go, FM. (2003) 'Deconstructing Destination Image in the Information Age' *Information Technology and Tourism,* 6 (1) 13 - 29

Hanrahan, J, Krahanbuhn, P. (2011). *An assessment of Tourism Demand for use of Travel Guides,* Failte Ireland Applied Research Scheme 2011. Presented at 8th annual THRIC Conference.

Hyun, MY and O'Keefe, RM. (2012) 'Virtual destination image: Testing a telepresence model' *Journal of Business Research,* 65 (1) 29 – 35

ITIC (2010) *Tourism and Travel Distribution in a Changed World* [online], available: http://www.itic.ie/fileadmin/docs/PRINT-V1
Tourism_and_Travel_Distribution_in_a_Changed_World_Sept_2010.pdf [accessed 22 Nov 2014]

Jennings, G. (2010). Tourism Research. 2nd ed. Australia: Wiley and Sons

Jensen, C.S., Jensen, C.S., Vicente, C.R., Vicente, C.R., Wind, R. & Wind, R. 2008, "User-Generated Content: The Case for Mobile Services", Computer, vol. 41, no. 12, pp. 116-118.

Jeong, C., Holland, S., Jun, S.H. & Gibson, H. 2012, "Enhancing destination image through travel website information", International Journal of Tourism Research, vol. 14, no. 1, pp. 16-27.

Krippendorf, K. (2004). Content Analysis: An Introduction to its Methodology. 2nd ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications

Lee, W., & Gretzel, U. (2012). Designing persuasive destination websites: a mental imagery processing perspective. Tourism Management, 33, 1270e1280.

Lee, W., Gretzel, U., & Law, R. (2010). Quasi-trial experiences through sensory information on destination web sites. Journal of Travel Research, 49(3), 310e322.

Lee, B. K., & Lee, W. N. (2004). The effect of information-overload on consumer choice quality in an on-line environment. Psychology & Marketing, 21(3),159e183.

Leung, D., Law, R. & Lee, H.A. 2011, "The perceived destination image of Hong Kong on Ctrip.com", International Journal of Tourism Research, vol. 13, no. 2, pp. 124-140.

Llodrà-Riera, I., Martínez-Ruiz, M.P., Jiménez-Zarco, A.I. & Izquierdo-Yusta, A. 2015, "A multidimensional analysis of the information sources construct and its relevance for destination image formation", Tourism Management, vol. 48, pp. 319-328.

Li, X.R. & Pan, B. 2011, "The long tail of destination image and online marketing", Annals of Tourism Research, vol. 38, no. 1, pp. 132-152.

MacKay, K.J. & Couldwell, C.M. 2004, "Using Visitor-Employed Photography to Investigate Destination Image", Journal of Travel Research, vol. 42, no. 4, pp. 390-396.

Mohammed, I., Guillet, D. B. and Law, R. (2015) The Contributions of Economics to Hospitality Literature: A content analysis of hospitality and tourism journals. International Journal of Hospitality Management, 44, 99-110

Muehlenhaus, I. (2011) Another Good Method: How to use Quantitative Content Analysis to Study Variation in Thematic Map Design. (University of Wisconsin- La Crosse)

Neuman, W. (2006). Social Research Methods, Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches. 6th ed. Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon

Neuhofer, B. et al (2012) 'Conceptualising technology enhanced destination experiences' *Journal of Destination Management and Marketing 1* (2012) 36 – 46

Pawaskar, P and Goel, M. (2014) 'A Conceptual Model: Multisensory Marketing and Destination Branding' *Procedia Economics and Finance* 11 (2014) 255 - 267

Pearce, DG. And Shanzel, HE. (2014) 'Destination Management: The tourists perspective' *Journal of Destination Marketing & Management* 2 (3) 137 – 145

Prentice, R and Anderson, V (2000) 'Evoking Ireland: Modeling Tourist Propensity', *Annals of Tourism Research*, 28 (2) 490 – 516

Rasinger, J., Fuchs, M., Beer, T., & Hopken, W. (2009). Bulding a mobile tourist guide based on tourists' on-site information needs. *Tourism Analysis*, 14, 483-502.

Rheem, C., (2012) Empowering Inspiration: The Future of Travel Search, *PhocusWright*, Feb. 2012), Researched and Written by Carroll Rheem Sponsored by Amadeus

Sarantakos, S. (2005). Social Research. 2nd ed. South Melbourne: Palgrave MacMillan

Stamboulis, Y and Skayannis, P. (2002) 'Innovation strategies and technology for experience-based tourism' *Tourism Management*, 24 (2003) 35 – 43

Stepchenkova, S. & Eales, J.S. 2011, "Destination image as quantified media messages: the effect of news on tourism demand", Journal of travel research, vol. 50, no. 2, pp. 198-212.

SKIFT (2013) *Top 25 Online Booking sites in Travel* [online] available; http://skift.com/2013/11/11/top-25-online-booking-sites-in-travel/ [accessed 04 Nov 2014]

Skift (2014) *The Skift Report* [online], available: http://skift.com/travel-trends/the-state-of-mobile-booking-2015/ [accessed 23 Nov 2014]

Smith, K (2003) *Issues in Cultural Tourism Studies*, London Routledge

Sweetow, S. 2007, YouTube GENERATION: Creating Viral Videos Via User-Generated Content Sites, Information Today, Inc, Wilton.

Tseng, C., Wu, B., Morrison, A.M., Zhang, J. & Chen, Y. 2015, "Travel blogs on China as a destination image formation agent: A qualitative analysis using Leximancer", Tourism Management, vol. 46, pp. 347-358.

Smith, W.W., Li, X.(., Pan, B., Witte, M. & Doherty, S.T. 2015, "Tracking destination image across the trip experience with smartphone technology", Tourism Management, vol. 48, pp. 113-122.

Vitouladiti, O. (2014) Content Analysis as a Research Tool for Marketing, Management and Development Strategies in Tourism. Economics and Finance, 9, 278-287

Ye, Q., Law, R., Gu, B., & Chen, W. (2011). The influence of user generated content on traveller behaviour: an empirical investigation on the effects of e-word-of-mouth to hotel online bookings. Computers in human behaviour, 27(2), 634-639

Zhou, L (2014) 'Online rural destination images: Tourism and rurality' *Journal of Destination Marketing*

Zipf, G.K. (1949) 'Human Behaviour and the Principle of Least-Effort.' *Addison- Wesley*