

Contents lists available at [ScienceDirect](http://www.sciencedirect.com)

Journal of Destination Marketing & Management

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/jdmm

Research Paper

How 'social' are destinations? Examining European DMO social media usage

Ahmet Uşaklı^a, Burcu Koç^a, Sevil Sönmez^{b,*}^a Department of Tourism Management, Faculty of Tourism, Gazi University, Bahçelievler Mah., 06830 Golbasi, Ankara, Turkey^b Department of Tourism, Events, and Attractions, Rosen College of Hospitality Management, University of Central Florida, 9907 Universal Blvd., Orlando, FL 32819, United States

ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

Social media
DMOs
Europe
Facebook
Twitter
Instagram
YouTube

ABSTRACT

This study explores how European DMOs use social media to promote and market their destinations and extends extant research on social media in tourism by: (1) using a larger sample size of 50 European countries, (2) including two additional social media platforms (*Instagram* and *YouTube*) to current investigations that commonly focus on *Facebook* and *Twitter*, (3) extending the scope of measures used in the content analysis, and (4) investigating social media platforms over a longer time period of a full year. Content analysis of measures used to examine European DMO social media usage revealed seven categories: (1) *content*, (2) *major theme*, (3) *information type*, (4) *engagement*, (5) *interactivity*, (6) *promotion* and (7) *customer service*. Based on content analysis of a systematic random sample of 3546 social media postings, results clearly indicate that social media is of interest to European DMOs. Among all European destinations, Turkey, Finland, Ireland, Netherlands and Spain were found to have a higher level of engagement, whereas France, Cyprus, Russia, Luxembourg and Norway were found to be more interactive. Findings suggest that European DMOs utilize social media as a traditional marketing tool, rather than exploiting it as a customer service tool to mitigate potential customer problems.

1. Introduction

In today's highly competitive travel market, destinations are adding digital tools to their traditional marketing practices to attract visitors. In recent years, social media has emerged as a powerful and low-cost marketing tool with global reach. Although social media platforms have demonstrated a reciprocal and growing interest in the tourism industry (Chan & Denizci Guillet, 2011; Gretzel, Fesenmaier, Formica, & O'Leary, 2006; Xiang & Gretzel, 2010), tourism research on the use of social media remains limited. Comprehensive review studies focusing on social media in tourism and hospitality have identified this research gap (e.g. Leung, Law, van Hoof & Buhalis, 2013; Zeng & Gerritsen, 2014). Extant research on the use of social media in tourism has focused mainly on the: (1) use of social media by tourists (user/tourist-generated content) and (2) adoption of social media practices by tourism enterprises. Hence, the type and extent of social media use by destination marketing organizations (DMOs) responsible for the marketing and management of tourism in particular geographic areas, remains largely unknown (Munar, 2012). Research on how DMOs use social media to market their destinations is limited (Dwivedi, Yadav, & Venkatesh, 2011; Feng, Morrison, & Ismail, 2003; Hays, Page, & Buhalis, 2013; Mariani, Di Felice, & Mura, 2016; Munar, 2012;

Stankov, Lazić, & Dragičević, 2010). One of the pioneer studies in this area was carried out by Hays et al. (2013).

In their exploratory study, Hays et al. (2013) investigated social media usage among DMOs of the top 10 most-visited countries by analyzing the content of their *Facebook* pages and *Twitter* accounts. Results revealed that the usage of social media among top DMOs was still largely experimental and that further research, with a larger sample size, was needed. In response to this call for additional research, the present study aims to fill a sizeable gap in the literature and extends previous studies in several ways. First, this study uses a larger sample size (50 European countries) and applies a random sampling method for relevant social media postings to achieve greater generalizability. Second, unlike much of the previous research, the present study includes two additional social media platforms (*Instagram* and *YouTube*) in the investigation along with the commonly examined *Facebook* and *Twitter*. Third, this study contributes to the measurement of social media research by extending the scope of measures used by Hays et al. (2013) for the content analysis. Finally, to assure more comprehensive insight into DMO use of social media, the present study covers a longer time period of a full year (2015). The broad purpose of this study is to investigate DMO usage of social media in European countries.

* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: ahmet.usakli@gazi.edu.tr (A. Uşaklı), burcukoc@gazi.edu.tr (B. Koç), sevil.sonmez@ucf.edu (S. Sönmez).

2. Social media usage in tourism

Social media have fundamentally altered the way society creates and disseminates information (Buhalis & Law, 2008; Xiang & Gretzel, 2010), thereby changing both the demand (i.e. consumer decision process) and supply (i.e. marketing/management practices for businesses/organizations) sides of the tourism industry.

For travelers, social media has become a critical information source (Amaro, Duarte, & Henriques, 2016; Hudson & Thal, 2013; Zeng & Gerritsen, 2014), which is understandable since tourism products are usually considered highly risky purchases (Kim, Qu, & Kim, 2009) because they cannot be evaluated prior to consumption (Schmallegger & Carson, 2008). Therefore, new and emerging sources of information (i.e. social media) are used to minimize risks of making wrong travel decisions (Leung, Schuckert & Yeung, 2013). Traveler use of social media occurs before, during, and after the trip. In the pre-trip phase, travelers use social media to search for potential destinations, transportation options, accommodations as well as leisure activities available at the destination (Cox, Burgess, Sellitto, & Buultjens, 2009). During this phase, travelers exhibit passive participation rather than creating their own content on social media (e.g. reviews, recommendations). During the trip, travelers' use of social media appears to decrease, compared with the pre-trip phase (Cox et al., 2009); however, their participation becomes more active through content creation (e.g. user generated). More specifically, travelers begin to share their own travel experiences by uploading visual content (i.e. photos, videos) (Munar & Jacobsen, 2014). Travelers' use of social media reaches a peak during the post-trip phase (Fotis, Buhalis, & Rossides, 2012). Upon returning home, travelers generally use social media to share their personal recommendations and level of satisfaction or dissatisfaction regarding the trip through reviews, comments, photos, videos, or audios (Amaro et al., 2016; Leung, Law, van Hoof, & Buhalis, 2013; Leung, Schuckert, & Yeung, 2013). As implied in all three phases, social media serves as a crucial word-of-mouth platform that influences other travelers' decisions (Litvin, Goldsmith and Pan, 2008; Hudson, Roth, Madden & Hudson, 2015; Luo & Zhong, 2015).

Most studies on social media in tourism are consumer-centric, suggesting that travelers' use of social media or the influence of social media on tourist behavior has been studied often (Denizci Guillet, Kucukusta, & Liu, 2016). On the other hand, few researchers have focused on tourism suppliers' perspectives. Thus, little is known about how tourism suppliers or organizations utilize social media (Munar, 2012).

Research reveals that tourism organizations use social media primarily in the areas of marketing, management, communication and product distribution (Leung, Law, van Hoof, & Buhalis, 2013; Leung, Schuckert, & Yeung, 2013). First, business literature (Gelb & Sundaram, 2002; Kim & Ko, 2012) in general and tourism literature in particular (Denizci Guillet et al., 2016, Hays et al., 2013; Kim, Koh, Cha & Lee, 2015; Kim, Lim, & Brymer, 2015) argue that suppliers use social media most often for marketing purposes since traditional media is no longer sufficient and due to the popularity of social media among consumers. Indeed, a number of studies focusing on different tourism contexts (e.g. hotels, airlines, travel agencies) have found that social media is actively used as a marketing tool in the industry (e.g., Chan & Denizci Guillet, 2011; Denizci Guillet et al., 2016; Huang, 2012; Leung, Schuckert & Yeung, 2013; Phelan, Chen, & Haney, 2013). However, many organizations simply transfer their existing marketing activities onto social media platforms, rather than exploiting the transformational potential of social media. For instance, in their study of investigating social media usage of the top 133 hotel brands in China, Denizci Guillet et al. (2016) found that most of the hotels utilized social media mainly for disseminating and receiving information regarding the hotel services. In other words, few hotels used social media for more enhanced and sophisticated marketing activities, such as performing marketing research and strengthening collaboration with their affiliates

(Denizci Guillet et al., 2016; Phelan et al., 2013). A similar pattern of results was found for travel agencies (Huang, 2012), airlines (Leung, Schuckert & Yeung, 2013) and DMOs (Hays et al., 2013; Milwood, Marchiori, & Zach, 2013), indicating that tourism organizations, regardless of their type, are still in the experimental stage of utilizing social media as a marketing tool. Second, previous studies confirm that social media is used for management functions in a tourism organization, such as financial management and crisis management (e.g., Fuchs, Scholochov & Höpken, 2009; Huang, 2012; Ketter, 2016; Noone, McGuire, & Rohlf, 2011; Sigala, 2011). Specifically, Kim, Lim, and Brymer (2015) and Kim, Koh, Cha and Lee (2015) found a positive and linear effect of US restaurant firms' activities in social media on firm value. Regarding the use of social media for crisis management, Ketter (2016) argues that *Facebook* served as a destination image restoration tool after the Gurkha Earthquake in Nepal. Some authors also suggest that social media can be used for other management functions, such as by developing 'intra-net blogs' for training and career development in businesses (Leung, Schuckert & Yeung, 2013) or by developing 'business-to-business blogs' for internal communication among suppliers (Lew, 2007). Third, social media is used as a communication tool that facilitates interaction and engagement between suppliers and tourists (e.g. Kim, Lim, & Brymer, 2015; Kim, Koh, Cha, & Lee, 2015; Schmallegger & Carson, 2008; Thevenot, 2007). The interaction and engagement with tourists is a critical issue for suppliers since a late- or non-response to concerns raised on social media indicates that a supplier demonstrates low responsiveness to its customers, thereby contributing to a potential loss of business (Chan & Denizci Guillet, 2011). However, previous studies indicate that tourism organizations generally perform poorly in developing interaction and communication with tourists on social media (Chan & Denizci Guillet, 2011; Denizci Guillet et al., 2016; Hsu, 2012; Kim, Lim & Brymer, 2015; Phelan et al., 2013; Wattanacharoensil & Schuckert, 2015). Finally, it has been suggested that social media can be used as an indirect product distribution channel that stimulates demand and facilitates the direct distribution of products (Laws, 2001; Noone et al., 2011). A recent study surveying hoteliers in a Swiss touristic region empirically confirmed this argument by revealing that social media is actively used for selling rooms online (Inversini & Masiero, 2014). Nevertheless, evidence to support the use of social media as a tourism distribution channel is still extremely limited (Leung, Law, van Hoof, & Buhalis, 2013; Leung, Schuckert, & Yeung, 2013).

3. Methodology

The present study addresses an area of research that has been little developed and is therefore exploratory in nature. A two-phase study (pilot; primary) was conducted to develop a better understanding of social media usage of destination management organizations (DMOs). Content analysis was used to evaluate social media postings of European DMOs because it allows the researcher to 'use a set of procedures to make valid inferences from text' (Weber, 1990, p. 9).

3.1. The selection of social media platforms

As noted earlier, previous research on social media in tourism and hospitality has focused mainly on *Facebook* and/or *Twitter* (e.g. Hays et al., 2013; Hsu, 2012; Jabreel, Moreno, & Huertas, 2016; Kwok & Yu, 2013; Mariani et al., 2016; Philander & Zhong, 2016; Stankov et al., 2010) because they were considered to be the most common social media platforms that tourism organizations participated in. This is also in line with global social media account ownership and active usage data (Golbeck, 2015). For instance, *Facebook*, a social networking site launched in 2004, has an average of under two billion (1.79 billion for September 2016) monthly active users (Facebook, 2016), placing it as the most used social media platform in the world (Golbeck, 2015). On the other hand, *Twitter*—a microblogging website launched in 2006 that

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/5108325>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/5108325>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)