



Editorial

The Evolving Dynamics of Social Media in Internet Tourism Marketing

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It's no earth shattering revelation to discuss the use of the Internet in tourism marketing efforts. The facilitation of tourism-based websites has been ongoing since the medium began enjoying widespread usage in the 1990s. Today it has become almost impossible to conceive of marketing efforts in tourism without a significant Internet component; however, as the use of the Internet continues to evolve consideration must be given to the directions in which users expect the medium to develop.

In the past five years the trend in Internet usage has been toward more user-driven content, specifically in the form of social media. Almost every major tourism authority or tourism related industry maintains some form of social media presence be it a Facebook page, a Twitter feed or use of blogs, YouTube video channels or subscription email services. Furthermore websites such as TripAdvisor allow travelers to seek out third party opinions about destinations, accommodations, airlines, restaurants and attractions allowing them to verify or augment statements found on official websites or social media outlets.

These developments offer researchers in tourism and hospitality a healthy array of research possibilities. Not only are researchers able to examine ways in which these promotional instruments can be used by marketing practitioners in the industry but opportunities exist to examine the potential impacts in these new directions social media is taking online marketing efforts. Studies by Hvass and Munar [1] and Scott and Orlikowski [2] have examined on a broader scale the use of social media in tourism and can offer some insight as to why tourism researchers need to pay attention to the social media impacts on the industry, however, examination of issues in a more narrow focus is salient to this research as well. Take for instance the study conducted by Chan and Guillet [3] on the impact of social media marketing in the Hong Kong hotel sector. Their findings provide researchers a framework from which other similar studies may evolve. How social media can impact a specific tourism related industry in a specific area is not only worth investigation, but can easily serve as the starting point for replication and verification of the findings in Hong Kong and elsewhere.

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In consideration of opportunities for studying online social media impacts in tourism and hospitality for a broader geographic region (and moving beyond one specific industry) one could look to the work of du Plessis and Maennig [4] in their examination of the economic impacts in South Africa during the 2010 FIFA World Cup and the role of social media and its long term effects or to Crofton & Parker's [5] study on the economic impact social media marketing has had in the tourism industry of Atlantic Canada. No doubt the 2012 Summer Olympic Games in London will offer tourism and hospitality researchers a treasure trove of opportunities to examine, focus and discuss on the vast amount of social media opportunities associated with those games.

But beyond initial studies of the various types of social media, the differing impacts, and how they are used in tourism and hospitality, researchers should be prepared to consider other questions and delve deeper into the use of social media as a promotional tool. An important item for specific consideration will be the future development of social media. Where will Facebook go? Will it suffer the fate of MySpace or will it be the long lasting online vehicle of choice for social media promotion? What about Pinterest? Could it possibly replace Facebook or Twitter? What will be the lifespan of these ventures and what will be their ultimate impact on the tourism and hospitality industries?

Additionally as administrators, governments and other stakeholders in academic research look to increase accountability among practitioners in the academic community it will be important to consider ways in which tourism and hospitality impact demographics, the environment, economics, commerce and finance. Studies that seek to measure the economic, commercial and financial impacts could very well be important in justifying research agendas and may be the key to successful research grant proposals.

Although the Internet is a primary medium by which many consumers receive their information before making decisions about travel and hospitality experiences, one should also consider traditional media approaches and the potential crossover between the two. Lonely Planet and other travel publishers have begun to make their publications available electronically and magazines such as *National Geographic Traveler* have developed media apps for iPads and other tablet devices. How these traditional media utilize social media opportunities should be an area rich in opportunity for many researchers as well.

Social media marketing efforts in tourism and hospitality related industries will most likely be an important element in the marketing mix for many years to come. As the usage of social media tools continues to grow and evolve, researchers should have ample opportunity to discover best practices, tie theory back to reality and conduct a myriad of projects that could help tourism and hospitality officials better understand the optimum approaches to social media marketing in the industry and for their regions.

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