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User-Generated Videos in Tourism Destination Marketing: Using Narrative Analysis to Deconstruct Video Travel Stories

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ABSTRACT

The social media phenomenon has impacted travel and tourism marketing, creating new and exciting paths for destination promotion, and blurring the traditional roles of destinations as message producers, and consumers as message receivers. The goal of this paper is to explore the transition to C2C marketing, and to present a case study analysis of user-generated video in tourism destination promotion. This form of video story-telling calls for a new method of market research. Narrative analysis is applied.

INTRODUCTION

In today's golden age of consumer empowerment (Blackshaw, 2008) a new type of relationship between business and consumer has emerged. The burgeoning interactivity promises greater degrees of consumer engagement, and the possibilities of increased product and service exploration, particularly for hedonic purchases (Gammack & Hodgkinson, 2003). This bodes well for travel and tourism, where Internet communication has become more preferred as a travel information source (Buhalis & Law, 2008). Recognizing the power of electronic consumer-to-consumer (C2C) communication, more and more organizations have developed frameworks to facilitate the distribution of user-generated content (UGC). The most well known of the UGC Web sites are MySpace, Facebook and YouTube, started in 2003, 2004 and 2005 respectively. As an indication of the value of UGC-based sites, YouTube was purchased by Google in 2006 for \$1.65 billion in stock (Latham, Butzer & Brown, 2008). Incredibly, some 65,000 videos are uploaded and 100 million videos are viewed daily on YouTube (Latham *et al.*, 2008).

Destination marketing organizations (DMOs) have responded to the advancement of media technologies by shifting marketing efforts from traditional marketing to online marketing, primarily focusing on website development and online advertising (Pan, MacLaurin & Crotts, 2007). More recently, DMOs have begun to take advantage of Web 2.0 social media marketing applications, such as the hosting of message boards and online communities relevant to their destination. The complex forms of marketing that now can be either produced and/or distributed by consumer and/or organization, are delineated in the matrix presented as Figure 1. For example, traditional marketing is produced and distributed by an organization or destination for the consumer. Corporate Blogs use new media yet still follow this traditional B2C model, with advantages of control and reach. Viral marketing is also produced by the destination or organization, but is distributed by consumers in a B2C2C model. Web 2.0 has expanded the possibilities of consumer produced marketing, either distributed by the consumer in a C2C model, or by the destination in a C2B2C model. The practise of marketing, which not too long ago was like a carefully controlled speech, has now become an open forum bear pit!

Since YouTube's grand entrance onto the Web in 2005, one form of UGC, known as user-generated video (UGV), has grown exponentially. In the U.S., 29% of online consumers

watch UGVs at least once a month, making it the most popular activity of online social participants, ahead of visiting social network sites (for example, Facebook) at 25%, reading blogs at 25%, and participation in discussion forums at 18% (Bernoff & Li, 2008). UGVs can be considered visual stories, told by subjects to an audience through self-made productions, with the intent to convey a meaning (Pace, 2008). Online communities are contexts in which stories are shared (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001), and often these stories relate to the consumption of goods, services, brands and destinations. While the popularity of UGVs is certainly recognized by destinations and travellers alike, there is little research to substantiate their effectiveness.

Figure 1: Matrix of online marketing genres by producer/distributor control

		PRODUCER	
		Destination/Organization	Tourist/Consumer
DISTRIBUTOR	Destination/ Organization	Traditional Marketing Corporate Blogs/Vlogs <i>B2C</i>	Participatory Marketing Collaborative Blogs/Vlogs <i>C2B2C</i>
	Tourist/ Consumer	Viral Marketing Collaborative Blogs/Vlogs <i>B2C2C</i>	Vigilante Marketing Individual Blogs/Vlogs <i>C2C</i>

Traditional Marketing (B2C): business-generated, paid, dissemination of one-to-many marketing messages, where product features and corporate values are communicated and repeated over time.

Participatory Marketing (C2B2C): Interactive, co-produced marketing, using social media software to create and distribute, share and communicate, with consumers as the co-creators.

Viral Marketing (B2C2C): individuals passing on to others marketing messages originally developed by a business organization, thereby multiplying the original marketing exposure.

Vigilante Marketing (C2C): unpaid advertising and marketing efforts, including one-to-one, one-to-many, and many-to-many commercially oriented communications, undertaken by brand loyalists on behalf of the brand. (Muniz & Schau, 2007)

Blogs: an online diary, or “weB log” of frequent thoughts and Web links, typically in reverse-chronological order. Individual Blogs are typically managed by one individual, corporate blogs are managed by an organization, typically with a representative who

regularly updates content and contributes comments reflecting organizational values, and collaborative blogs have multi-contributors that are a form of community.

Vlogs: a video form of blogging, or “Video log”, often with supporting text and other metadata; and Moblogs is the mobile form of blogging.

Alongside the spread of destination websites through the 1990s, metrics were developed to measure their effectiveness. The Balanced Scorecard approach was introduced as a Website evaluation tool in 1999, and continues to be modified (Morrison, Taylor & Douglas, 2004). Website evaluation is far from standardized, with new approaches and evaluation criteria still emerging (Ham, 2004; Park & Gretzel, 2007; Wang, 2008). UGC has received less research attention, understandable given that it is a more recent application. Tourism researchers have recognized the potential benefit of analyzing travel blogs as a cost-effective method of gathering rich, authentic and unsolicited consumer feedback (Pan, *et al.*, 2007). Many consumer insights have been gained through recent blog analysis. Studies have profiled bloggers (Papacharissi, 2002), and identified critical blogger motivations, such as pleasure, enjoyment and learning (Firat & Vicdan, 2008).

Still, there is relatively little research of Web 2.0 applications specifically within travel and tourism. When studied, travel blogs have great potential to inform tourism marketers. Research has identified, for example, the strengths and weaknesses of a destination through analysis of authentic and unsolicited consumer blogs (Pan, *et al.*, 2007). The study of UGVs represents an even wider gap in the travel and tourism research, despite their proliferation. A recent and notable study by Tussyadiah and Fesenmaier (2009) presents a detailed analysis of 120 UGVs of New York City, finding that UGVs provide pleasure to viewers by stimulating fantasies, daydreams and past travel memories. The authors conclude with a call for future investigations to better understand the role of technology in mediating the tourist experience. Thus, a cross-disciplinary review of marketing and technology literature was undertaken by the author in order to identify appropriate methods of evaluating UGVs.

Advertising research sheds much light on the popularity of UGVs. Structuring advertisements as stories, with a plot and a brand as hero, can make the message more persuasive than an analytical illustration of product features (Escalas, 2007). Self-referencing theory is also relevant to UGVs effectiveness. When consumers see ads they can refer to themselves, they elicit more positive attitudes (Debevec & Iyer, 1988). Another relevant concept is that of authenticity, frequently seen as positively correlated to traveller attitudes (Cohen, 1988; Hughes, 1995). Simon Anholt (2007), a popular destination brander, describes place branding strategy as coming up with a brand story for the whole region that is inspiring and magnetic, but also credible. For destinations that can create a visual brand story, there is evidence that viewers will become absorbed in the story, and be narratively transported, and as such, persuaded by the information (Escalas, 2007). Narrative transportation is different from traditional elaboration-based persuasion models that focus on cognitive response processes (Petty, Cacioppo and Schumann, 1983). With narrative transportation, persuasion is more of an affective response to being immersed in a story (Escalas, 2007). The author proposes that UGVs have the potential to persuade through narrative transportation.

RESEARCH METHOD

Given the story-like nature of UGVs, a qualitative consumer research method of narrative analysis is proposed. Narrative analysis, while historically common in fields of psychology, sociology and the humanities, has recently gained ground in consumer and market research (Shankar & Goulding, 2001). It is used to examine the flow of first-person accounts of experiences in the stories they tell, with the objective of understanding their meaning (Gubrium & Holstein, 2009). Using narrative concepts such as plot, character, structure and language (Pace, 2008) UGVs can be deconstructed and their meanings interpreted. As artefacts of actual destination experiences, UGVs may reveal the most salient trip experiences -- those the traveller chooses to share -- a visual glimpse of behaviour that in the not so distant past was only interpretable via consumer survey.

To apply narrative analysis to the deconstruction and evaluation of UGVs, the Canadian Tourism Commission (CTC) case was selected. The CTC is Canada's national DMO, known for its innovative use of electronic marketing. The CTC was one of the first DMOs to incorporate UGVs into their commercial tourism marketing campaign (CTC, 2008). Four short UGVs, still shots presented as Figure 2, illustrate what has become a consumer-to-business-to-consumer (C2B2C) production/distribution process. This is an example of participatory marketing (Figure 1), whereby the consumer works as a partner with a business organization to co-create marketing.

Figure 2: Campaign Integrated User Generated Videos: C2B2C



Canadian Tourism Commission (2008) <http://www.keep-exploring.ca/mediavideo/en/>

FINDINGS

Table 1 presents a deconstruction of the UGVs in terms of four familiar dimensions of narratives – the plot (point of the story), the characters (players and setting), the structure (pattern of beginning, middle, end), and the language (verbal expression). Narrative researchers refer to “good” stories as being complete stories (Gubrium & Holstein, 2009), and so the UGVs are assessed in terms of their inclusion or exclusion of literary dimensions. This is far from an

exact science, and it is entirely likely that to some viewers, an incomplete story is preferable to a complete one. Perhaps even more subjective qualities of “good” stories are whether narratives are compelling and entertaining, yet ultimately, there are no straightforward criteria that apply across contexts (Gubrium & Holstein, 2009). Perhaps the most important dimension is the theme that underlies the story, and its representativeness of the destination’s brand. To this end, the UGVs are assessed individually, in terms of their completeness, and collectively, in terms of a cohesive theme.

Table 1: Deconstruction of User-Generated Travel Video Narratives

Dimensions	
Plot	The point; action; chain of events
Character	The players; items of setting
Structure	The organization; pattern (beginning, middle, end)
Language	The verbal expression
UGV Analysis	
Zip Trek Narrative Analysis	<p>The main story of this video is quite simple. It is to speed, suspended from the top to the bottom of the zip trek. The main character screams throughout his brief journey, so the structure, from beginning to end, is only slightly differentiated by the moving background. The main character’s expression is the strongest element of the story.</p> <p>Theme: adventure, drama</p>
Seal on Kayak Narrative Analysis	<p>The main story appears to be a seal attempting to climb on a kayak. However, the jumpy film-style distracts somewhat from the plot. A beginning, middle and end pattern is unclear. The character who is filming, and thus not in the film, is only vaguely audible, and moderately expressive. The character of the seal, while cute, comes in and out of focus, thereby blurring the overall impression.</p> <p>Theme: adventure, drama, wildlife</p>
Iceberg Narrative Analysis	<p>The main story of this video is the falling ice chunks viewed in close proximity by persons in a boat. The plot is supported by narrative that informs the viewer that it is one person’s first time being this close to an iceberg. Structurally, the falling ice creates a visual pattern, filmed effectively from the water. The character voices provide strong expression.</p> <p>Theme: adventure, drama, winter</p>
Niagara Narrative Analysis	<p>The main story is simply a person’s reaction to Niagara Falls, presented in an authentic and personal style. The main character expresses her feelings to the person behind the camera, who one senses is a close friend. Then it ends, with little structural pattern or organization.</p> <p>Theme: adventure, drama</p>

The evaluation of each UGV suggests that the Iceberg video story is the strongest narrative, as it features the clearest plot – the falling ice – that is valued positively by the main

characters in the story, and creates a dramatic beginning, middle and end pattern. By contrast, the Seal on Kayak video story is the weakest narrative, as its plot is less clear, the main character is barely audible, and it lacks organizational structure. The Zip Trek and Niagara videos both feature charismatic main characters as their strongest literary dimension, but with less structure. When all four UGVs are considered, the drama and adventure theme comes through clearly as a narrative strength.

APPLICATION OF RESULTS

A UGV represents a manifestation of a traveller's destination experience. Narrative stories for market researchers help to identify meaning travellers ascribe to their trip experiences. Though subjective, this approach to evaluation of narrative dimensions can help marketers select the most effective UGVs to incorporate in their campaigns. More importantly, when considered holistically, these narratives can be interpreted as representations of the destination experience. In this case study, the selected UGVs convey conventional meanings of Canada -- a sense of adventure and uniqueness (Niagara Falls, Zip Trekking), and winter (Seal on Kayak, Iceberg) -- with each main character playing the role of an adventurer. While this adventurous trait partially defines each character, it is also clear that these players are quite average, ordinary people, and not professional actors or heroes. Ultimately, the UGVs present a thematic coherence to convey the brand story of Canada as a travel destination, consistent with the CTC brand tagline, "Keep Exploring" (CTC, 2008).

DISCUSSION

For travellers, new media has provided a sophisticated means of sharing travel stories. For researchers, UGV calls for much refinement of specific methods of research for such a new medium (Pace, 2008). Narrative analysis is a useful method of analyzing the meaning and effectiveness of UGVs, and is suggested as one approach for tourism market researchers to study social media content. The richness of narrative analysis is its ability to capture and interpret the subtle innuendos and situational particulars of travel stories and visuals. For this gain, however, the trade off is a loss in generalizability of findings. As a methodology, narrative analysis is considered an open process of collective knowledge (Riessman, 1993). Additional applications of narrative analysis to social media content in a travel context will help refine this method, and deepen our understanding of the role of UGVs in tourism communication.

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