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Web 2.0: New Rules for Tourism Marketing

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ABSTRACT

Web 2.0 technologies challenge many tourism marketers since they have to change their old marketing beliefs and quickly learn how to best capitalize on Web 2.0 technologies. Recognizing the growing importance of Web 2.0 technologies in tourism, this paper seeks to provide a new marketing framework to help travel marketers better understand the changing marketing environment and also to identify research opportunities for tourism researchers. The new marketing functions extended by Web 2.0 technologies are discussed based on current marketing literature. Further, case studies are presented to illustrate how these functions could be translated into practical tourism marketing strategies.

Keywords: *Web 2.0, online tourist behavior, marketing paradigm, social networks.*

INTRODUCTION

The emergence of Web 2.0 technologies has dramatically changed how travelers find, consume and create travel information (O'Connor, 2008). In the Web 2.0 era, consumers not only consume information but actively collaborate with peers in producing information. Web 2.0 technologies have affected the power structures in the marketplace, causing a substantial migration of market power from marketers towards consumers (Constantinides & Foundtain, 2008). This changing marketplace challenges many tourism marketers since they have to change their old marketing beliefs and quickly learn how to best capitalize on Web 2.0 technologies. Now is the time for the travel industry to rethink the traditional marketing rules and to embrace new rules of marketing as well as market research.

The topics of Web 2.0 and social media are attracting increasing attention in tourism research (e.g. Xiang & Gretzel, 2009; Pan et al., 2007; Tussyadiah & Fesenmaier, 2008) but findings are still too limited to inform all aspects of Web 2.0 marketing and research in tourism. Further, rapid developments in social media make the area very dynamic, with research results becoming outdated very quickly. Thus, more and more up-to-date research is needed and best practices have to be established. Recognizing the growing importance of Web 2.0 technologies in tourism, the goal of this paper is to provide a new marketing framework to help travel marketers better understand the changing marketing environment and also to identify the research opportunities for tourism researchers. This study adopts an "analytical approach" (Ritchie, 1996; Li & Petrick, 2008) to provide directions for theoretical development and also to

discuss the emerging challenges and opportunities that the field of tourism marketing is facing with the emergence of Web 2.0 technologies.

LITERATURE

Various definitions of Web 2.0 currently exist but the fundamental principle of Web 2.0 is that users add value by generating contents through a multitude of Web 2.0 application tools including blogs, wikis, widgets and social networks (Chaffey et al., 2009; Parise & Guinan, 2008; O'Reilly, 2005). The exponential growth of blogs, photo sharing sites, online product reviews, as well as Facebook and MySpace users, as evidenced through the use/member statistics on the respective sites, confirms that Web 2.0 has become a widespread phenomenon. This phenomenon has changed the roles and activities of online users. Web 2.0 is seen as a new stage in the evolution of the networked world (Constantinides & Foundtain, 2008).

According to social network theory, social networks provide channels for the flow of information (Michener, DeLamater & Myers, 2004) and knowledge structures and processes are constituted by relations among actors in the social networks (Knoke & Kuklinski, 1982). Different from traditional sociological perspectives that focused on attributes of individual actors, social network theory emphasizes the importance of individual actors' relationships and ties with other actors within the network (Granovetter, 1973; Meyer, 1994; Milgram, 1967). The impacts of social networks become even more important and obvious with the advances of Web 2.0 technologies. Individuals' social networks are not only limited to interpersonal levels but extended to world-systems levels. Further, online users can more easily share information using online social networks and actively create information in social platforms. In this new collaborative networked environment, a new marketing paradigm is needed to effectively approach Web 2.0 marketing.

Although the concept of Web 2.0 is relatively new in marketing, a number of previous studies have predicted substantial marketing shifts with new IT technologies. Table 1 provides an overview of the shifts that have been discussed in existing marketing literature. As suggested by these studies, in the Web 2.0 era, a marketer is not the sole influencer anymore but rather a part of big social networks. Marketing messages are not only created and broadcasted by marketers but also created and exchanged by empowered consumers (Hoffman & Novak, 1996; Blattberg & Deighton, 1996). New consumers build virtual communities (Armstrong & Hegel III, 1996) and exchange information in real time (McKenna, 1995). They often expect to receive individualized services (Martin, 1996) that meet their needs (Rayport & Sviokla, 1995) and only consume the information they trust (Urban et al., 1998; Brogan & Smith, 2009). Instead of interrupting consumers to deliver their marketing message, marketers need to seek the customer's permission before engaging them (Godin, 1999) and should consider consumers as their partners who collaborate and co-create value together by exchanging resources and information (Vargo & Lusch, 2004; McKenna, 1995). Further, Steenburgh, Avery and Dahod (2009) specifically address the notion of push versus pull marketing and propose that Web 2.0 marketing means pulling consumers to the brand through the use of Web 2.0 applications such as blogging and fan pages.

Table 1
Marketing Paradigm Shift

Literatures	Traditional Marketing	Web 2.0 Marketing
Hoffman & Novak (1996)	One-to-Many communication	Many-to-Many communication
Martin (1996); Anderson (2006)	Mass marketing	Individualized marketing
Blattberg & Deighton (1996)	Monologue	Dialogue
Rayport & Sviokla (1995)	Supply-side thinking	Demand-side thinking
Martin (1996)	Megabrand	Diversity
Blattberg, et al. (1994)	Centralized market	Decentralized market
McKenna (1995)	Customer as a target	Customer as a partner
Armstrong & Hagel III (1996),	Segmentation	Communities
Vargo & Lusch (2004)	Product exchange	Resources/Value exchange
McKenna (1995)	Delayed-time marketing	Real-time marketing
Godin (1999)	Interruption marketing	Permission marketing
Urban et al. (1998), Brogan & Smith (2009)	Push-based marketing	Trust-based marketing
Steenburgh et al. (2009)	Outbound marketing	Inbound marketing

Recent tourism studies increasingly discuss Web 2.0 trends. Several researchers have pointed out the changing, more empowered role of tourists due to Web 2.0 availability (O'Connor, 2008; Sigala, 2008a) and the importance of tourist-generated contents in the context of travel decision-making (Litvin, Goldsmith & Pan, 2008; Pan, MacLaurin & Crofts, 2007; Yoo & Gretzel, 2008). Virtual tourist communities are actively created and used by tourists (Kim et al., 2004; Wang & Fesenmaier, 2004; Wang, Yu & Fesenmaier, 2001) and travel blogs have been identified as important opportunities to communicate information outside of the dominant narratives of tourism marketers (Pudliner, 2007; Tussyadiah & Fesenmaier, 2008; Gretzel, Lee, Tussyadiah & Fesenmaier, 2009). Travelers often contribute and consume travel reviews online (Gretzel & Yoo, 2008; O'Connor, 2008; Vermeulen & Seegers, 2009) and the majority of them trust the reviews (Yoo et al., 2009). Multimedia including videos, photos and podcasting is increasingly used by travelers as a medium to portray tourism experiences (Tussyadiah & Fesenmaier, 2009; Xie & Liew, 2008) and social media play an important role not only for consumers but also in tourism marketing (Xiang & Gretzel, 2009; Carrera et al., 2008). For tourism marketing, this means that the concept of a “creative tourist” (modeled after Richard Florida’s, 2002, Creative Class) who actively wants to co-construct the experience and is in constant search for meaning as well as opportunities for self-expression through new media has to be embraced (Gretzel & Jamal, 2007). It also implies that tourism marketers need to fundamentally change their approaches and move from marketing with a sales focus to marketing as an activity that involves the management of conversations (Gretzel, Fesenmaier, Formica & O’Leary, 2006).

It is obvious from the studies presented above that Web 2.0 technologies take on an important role in tourist decision making and have therefore changed the tourism marketing environment. The question is how tourism marketers can effectively react to Web 2.0 trends and implement a successful marketing approach in this new environment. Several recent cases illustrate how Web 2.0 marketing approaches can be designed to align with emerging marketing paradigms and show how traditional marketing functions are extended with Web 2.0 tools.

METHODOLOGY

Employing an analytical approach, the goal of this study was to identify specific marketing functions that result from a shift in marketing from traditional to Web 2.0 approaches. Thus, the main results are based on inferences made from discussions found in the current marketing literature. Further, case studies were collected to illustrate how these functions could be translated into practical tourism marketing strategies.

RESULTS

New Web 2.0 paradigms applied to tourism marketing

We have identified several areas in which this active participation of consumers and the resulting changes in expectations require new approaches. These areas include customer relationship management, product development, promotion, pricing, distribution, market research as well as performance measurement. Table 2 summarizes the extended Web 2.0 marketing functions that were inferred from the existing literature (e.g. Chaffey et al., 2009).

Table 2
Marketing Functions Extended with Web 2.0 Technologies

Marketing Functions	Traditional Marketing	Web 2.0 Marketing
Customer Relations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - One-way communication - Offline customer service center - Limited customer data - Limited C2C communication - Delayed response 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Feedback from customer - Online customer service - Customer identification with data mining - Virtual customer communities - Real-time communication
Product	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Limited product information - Mass products for mainstream markets - Company-created products 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Value added info. on products: Pictures, video, catalog, consumer reviews etc. - Product customization - Co-creation with consumers - Digital/virtual Product
Price	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - One-price pricing - Limited payment options 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Flexible pricing (Price transparency) - Online payment
Promotion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Offline promotions - One promotion message - Partnerships with traditional partners - Targeting customers - Mediated through mass media 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Online promotions - Customized promotion messages - Non-traditional partnerships - Customer participation - Facilitated by Web 2.0 tools
Place	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Intermediaries - Required time to process order/booking - Offline distribution of products 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Dis-/ Re-intermediation - Real-time ordering and processing - Online distribution of products
Research	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Delayed results - Push - Encouraged through incentives - No follow-up - Mediated - Sporadic - Costly - Response limited to numbers and text 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Real-time info through RSS or email alerts - Pull - Based on altruistic motivations - Immediate reaction - Unmediated - Continuous - Free data - Multiple formats
Performance Measurement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Leads - Discrete times - Hard sales/visitor numbers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Conversations - Continuous - Consumer sentiment

The key change demanded by Web 2.0 marketing is acknowledging that empowered consumers participate in marketing activities, including branding, product development, product feedback and customer service (Parise & Guinan, 2008). This new paradigm has implications for all marketing functions. For instance, customer relationship needs to be more engaging and targeted, product development should actively involve consumers, and promotion can now increasingly take advantage of consumers as evangelists who will extensively share comments and evaluations with others. More conversations visible to anyone also mean more transparency, which can be a challenge regarding pricing. In general, communication processes need to speed up. Further, a connected social web of customers means that research approaches have to be adapted and that performance measurement criteria have to be changed.

Web 2.0 tourism marketing cases

A growing number of tourism companies deploy web-based communities to solicit travel experience sharing, to discuss product ideas and to provide a networking place for consumers. Although an increasing number of tourism providers and marketers delve into Web 2.0 marketing, efforts seem to be rather scattered and usually address only one marketing function. However, some interesting cases exist that can show how changes in marketing can be implemented. Thus, these cases further illustrate the emerging marketing paradigm and also suggest ways in which traditional marketing strategies can be extended with Web 2.0 tools.

For example, the Sheraton hotel website (Sheraton.com) provides a virtual community to encourage their guests to share their experiences online. Similarly, the Pennsylvania tourist office website (visitPA.com) encourages Website visitors to tell their stories of visits to Pennsylvania and presents the stories of others as important pieces of travel information. These first person stories trigger trust from other travelers, co-create the image of an organization, enable many-to-many communications, and thus provide a big potential for tourism marketing (Tussyadiah & Fesenmaier, 2008). The stories also serve as invaluable insights into the experiences of the consumers. Another notable change identified is the speed of communication. Real-time dialogue with consumers enables companies to conduct real-time marketing (McKenna, 1995). The Kogi Korean BBQ case well illustrates real-time marketing with Web 2.0 tools. Kogi is a company that offers tacos from its mobile trucks throughout LA. The company uses Twitter to tweet out the locations and times of the appearance of the trucks. Using Web 2.0 tools the company can communicate with consumers in real time thus can deliver the foods in a unique way to consumers.

Tapping into niche markets with individualized services becomes not only necessary but also much easier with Web 2.0 tools. Companies can hit untapped consumers with very specific interests using Web 2.0 applications (Anderson, 2006). One example is the Coffee Grounz, a Houston-area coffee shop. On the company's twitter page, consumers can place an order for their customized drink or foods and the coffee shop prepares the food the way the individual consumer desired it. Twitter is also used by JetBlue Airways. The airline not only maintains a Twitter channel to promote special deals, it has a separate Twitter account staffed with six people that focuses on customer questions and complaints (Bellstrom, 2010). Similarly, Hyatt Hotels have recently begun staffing its @HyattConcierge Twitter account around the clock. These examples illustrate a switch from asynchronous, problem-focused approaches to customer relations management to real-time feedback and problem-avoidance strategies.

Facebook fan pages are increasingly adopted by tourism marketers. For instance, the Elkhart County CVB maintains a fan page on which information about events in the community

as well as package deals are posted. The Facebook environment is very conducive to engage consumers in promotional efforts as they can easily comment on and share information with others. Online games or small software applications (so-called widgets) are also increasingly used for tourism marketing. TravelChannel.com developed an interactive Facebook application that encourages users to virtually “kidnap” their friends and hold them in a hideout city until the kidnapes can correctly answer the questions about the hideout location. Clues to those questions are then offered via the Travel Channel.com “Cheat sheet”. This new approach adds entertaining aspects to tourism marketing and therefore pulls consumers to visit the TravelChannel website as well as their Facebook page to download the application and to find the resources (clues) they need. In addition, third-party virtual tourist communities provide new marketing as well as research opportunities. Tripadvisor, for instance, makes the information generated by travelers available to licensed partners’ websites. Using this Tripadvisor system tourism marketers now can easily provide travelers' stories and photos on their websites and by doing so, online tourism marketers can create more interactive and trustful websites. At the same time Tripadvisor also provides tourism marketers with opportunities to be automatically alerted when their product is mentioned by users of the community. In addition, Tripadvisor increasingly facilitates conversations between consumers and marketers by allowing marketers to directly respond to consumer comments posted online.

The latest Hilton online direct marketing campaign entitled Hilton Design Studio provides an example for engaging consumers in product development and for an innovative approach to research. The campaign involves playing a game in order to obtain entries into a contest. The game is really a product design environment that asks consumers to choose a hotel location and then design the room of their dreams with the design elements that are provided. The elements have a specific cost assigned. In order to include more design elements, the player needs to answer trivia questions about Hilton. The social element is integrated in that the designed hotel will then be judged by other players. The hotel room design with the most votes will win a prize.

The paradigm shift in tourism marketing can also be illustrated with the “Best Job in the World” campaign by Tourism Queensland that asked contestants around the world to compete for a job that involves the marketing of an island destination in Australia through blog entries. So many consumers were willing to take on the job of a tourism marketer that the campaign Website crashed several times.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Li and Petrick (2008) noted that tourism marketing is in an era of paradigm shift. With the recent Web 2.0 wave, we indeed observe another wave of tourism marketing approaches changing the ways in which tourism providers and destinations interact and transact with potential and existing consumers. The newly emerging “connected” (Joel, 2009) marketplace requires new approaches of marketing. Having employed an analytical approach to current research and practical cases regarding Web 2.0 marketing, this paper set out to provide a tourism 2.0 marketing framework. This framework can provide a basis for Web 2.0 marketing as well as research. A framework is necessary so that tourism marketers can better envision how marketing strategies could be extended by integrating Web 2.0 tools. For example, CRM can be enhanced by providing virtual places in which consumers share their opinions and engage with other consumers as well as the company (Sigala, 2008b; Wang & Fesenmaier, 2004). These virtual communities can also help to increase quality and credibility of information, service quality and

brand reputation, thus in turn contribute to increased brand loyalty, commitment and sales (Jang, Ko & Koh, 2007). In addition, contents generated by consumers represent invaluable information for market research. Information posted by other consumers also often enhances other consumers' shopping experience since it reduces information search costs and allows for rapid comparison (Parameswarn & Whinston, 2007). From the perspective of researchers, the suggested framework identified a number of important areas in need of investigation. Studies that examine identified issues such as the co-creation of products and tourists' virtual experiences would better inform our understanding of Web 2.0 technology impacts. The area of performance measurement is a particularly pressing issue for many marketers and the framework shows that old approaches measuring leads and conversion are not going to be able to address the continuous measurement of conversations and sentiment. Social network theory will have to be more strongly integrated in tourism research in order to determine the value of relationships created with and among consumers. In addition, we need research methods that can deal with large numbers of text instead of numbers.

This area is rapidly changing and still many aspects are unknown. There are clear gaps in the theoretical understanding of Web 2.0 use and impacts from the consumer perspective and with respect to the organizational abilities of tourism organizations to take full advantage of the affordances inherent in Web 2.0 tools. The growing uses of mobile technologies is also an area that needs to be investigated in future research. In order to be relevant beyond a single application, the framework has to be general. However, specific issues might arise within the practices related to individual Web 2.0 technologies and need to be addressed in research to inform new tourism marketing approaches.

The Web 2.0 wave is here and continues to grow. Those tourism marketers who can actively adjust to this changing era and answer the emerging questions will be at the forefront of successful tourism marketing. However, they need the appropriate research to make informed decisions and design the most effective strategies. Best practice case studies provide a start in the effort of identifying potential approaches. However, empirical data collected through data mining research, quasi-experimental studies and surveys on consumer perceptions will be needed to determine general effectiveness and provide objective criteria of Web 2.0 marketing success.

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