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ABSTRACT

Social media technologies of Web 2.0 play an increasingly important role in destination brand management practice and the consumer selection of destinations. Consumers freely discuss their travel stories, travel recommendations, travel experiences and attitudes through blogs, forums and social media. This material is read and added to by millions of people and the content has a role in determining the image of a travel destination. Therefore it is critical that destination brand managers understand what is being discussed and written about their destination. What is the content of the Web 2.0 discussions? What are the attributes, associations, experiences, connotations, connections, contexts and ramifications?

INTRODUCTION

Many tourism businesses and destination marketing organizations (DMOs) try so hard to make their web sites effective in term of sales and marketing. There has been some research on measurement of successful web sites (e.g. Park and Gretzel, 2007), DMOs achievement and branding success (Blain, Levy and Ritchie, 2005, pg. 332). However there is less research on methods to assess and monitor Web 2.0 conversations? This study specifically explores the mechanisms and methodologies to assess perceived destination images and brand equity from social media technologies of Web 2.0.

The key sources of brand equity include awareness (Keller, 2003; Aaker, 1997), destination image (Tasci and Kozak, 2006), image and personality associations (Kapferer, 1997; Keller, 1993 Aaker and Joachimsthaler, 2000), trust (Williams, 2005), core brand characteristics (de Chernatony, 1993), consistency, perceived clarity, and credibility of the brand information
(Erdem and Swait, 1998), and loyalty. Social media formats especially video and photos are particularly significant for would-be travelers creating emotional relationships with the mental associations of a place. Further, the quantity and diversity of videos and images shared and available on Youtube and Flickr with regard to destinations along with the consumer to consumer interactions represent sources of novelty resulting in increased retention (Fenker and Schutze, 2008).

As mentioned in Blain et al. (2005, pg. 328), tourism destination branding is a relatively new, remains narrowly defined, and is not well represented in the tourism literature. Strong brand characteristics that need to be consistent with advertising and reinforcing a differentiated brand message (pg. 329) and the important of understanding a brand from the buyer’s perspective (pg.330). Tasci and Kozak (2006) conclude that it is important to assess the fit between the destination image project by the destination and the destination image received by consumers.

The objectives of this study are (1) to outline methodologies to assess destination image held by consumers who use social media; (2) provide an example of assessment using the destination of Paris, France; and (3) Discuss ways that a destination brand manager might monitor the health of the destination and the brand.

**METHOD**

This study uses multiple methods including the qualitative analysis of social media and quantitative measures of destination brands gleaned from what is being said about the destinations on blogs, forums and social media. Netnography (Kozinets, 2002) is used as an exploratory tool for studying social media including blog narratives relating to select destinations. Netnography commences with an entrée to blogs making use of preliminary searches of the blogosphere using Blogpulse search (Nielsen, 2008) and Blog search (Google, 2008). Additionally, a list of Web destinations e.g. wikipedia spawning community stories or myths (Campbell, 1949) of destinations is used to gain further insight. Purposive sampling is used to screen out Flogs (fake blogs), self-promotion, suspect messages and off-brand stories and any other contrived sites crafted by brand managers. The blog narratives once identified through the search process and meeting the criteria of a destination narrative are captured for further review and analysis.

To preserve the blog story, software to automatically download and create a local copy is used, for example, onfolio or netsnippets. Once downloaded, the blog themes are identified and text analysis software (Pennebaker, 2001) provides a psychological analysis including sentiment. This analysis compliments the marketing and advertising strategy implications of the story. This detailed analysis of an individual blog as a case study (see Theordorson and Theordorson, 1969) informs future search strategies across all social media for the destination under study. Going beyond blogs to include a variety of different social media e.g. Flickr, You Tube, Second Life and twitter netnography is modified to deal with images, audio and video including screening for the tourist gaze (Urry, 2002).

On a quantitative level the brand equity arising from the conversations taking place in social media can be generated from the Conversation Gap methodology (Rubel, 2005) which considers the gap between the total number of conversations about a product category and the proportion which mention a company or brand operating in the category. Equities of a brand is derived from the conversation gap method and defined as those topics being mentioned in conversations about a brand with the equity share corresponding to the frequency at which each
topic is mentioned. This approach helps to understand how associations or concepts evolve over time with single or multiple brands.

**FINDINGS**

The method is applied to a city destination brand – Paris for blogs and the following social media.

- A search for Paris, France on Flicker returns well over one and a half million photos and over quarter of a million for the Eiffel tower.
- You Tube has over 130,000 videos tagged Paris, France.
- Pages of real time Twitter messages.
- Google blog search shows 300,000 blog mentions of Paris, France.
- Around 4,000 entries on Boardtracker discussion board and over 60,000 on Boardreader.
- A virtual world of Paris in Second Life.

Youtube videos include Casablanca (1942) owing to the end of the movie quote “We’ll always have Paris” which breaks free from covering specific destination features of Paris (see Figure 1).

![How Web 2.0 Supports the Myth of Paris](image)

**Figure 1 How Web 2.0 Supports the Myth of Paris**
Equity share analysis of Paris attributes (see Figure 2) are generated for “vacation or holiday and Paris” and equity share analysis of attributes “love and Paris”, “lights and Paris” and “cafes and Paris”. To ensure disambiguation with “Paris Hilton”, “Paris, France” is used. The scale in figure 2 is actual % so 0.0150 is 0.0150% of all blog posts in the blogosphere mentioning the specified terms. This is the convention chosen by A. C. Nielsen. The total number of blogs identified by Nielsen as of today is: 106,127,380 with roughly 40,000 blogs added per day and excludes spam blogs. These statistics are normally detailed on www.blogpulse.com. Hence, a small % is not a major issue when dealing with such large numbers which continue to grow on a daily basis. Figure 3 represents a detailed blog story analysis is developed inclusive of major themes and text analysis revealing marketing and advertising strategy implications.

Figure 2 Equity Share Analysis of Paris Attributes

APPLICATION OF RESULTS

A holistic view of brand equity mashing up the various sources of social media represents the potential for a brand manager to monitor the health of the destination in real time based on the conversational and customer interactions in social media. Key technologies to support a social media dashboard include mashup technologies and RSS (Really Simple Syndication) feeds. Blogs are a recent addition to the sources of information impacting travel planning and decision making regarding destinations and related tourist spots. A blog impacts both brand equity through mentions of the destination as well as the destination image through relevant associations (e.g. Paris and love & “we’ll always have Paris”) to create the destination image. Through monitoring social media the Brand Manager can determine if “weak signals” are truly providing knowledge of a trend yet to emerge with destination usage but statistically insignificant. Twitter messages may represent an early warning of topic in advance of blogging. Increasingly, the brand landscape exhibits emergent behaviour meaning the destination equity
may be unpredictable at times but this is now a function of the brand interactions taking place between the conversations across different social media.

**CONCLUSION**

While we can see social media directly impacts destination brand equity, where exactly does this fit relative to the traditional media of film or television when it comes to recommendations and assessing overall destination brand equity impacts? Certainly, Youtube and Flickr potentially create similar levels of engagement with a place as film or tv and based on novelty (Fenker, 2008) these social media sharing sites help past and future travellers achieve greater retention of place associations. The actual conversations between users reinforce the type of recommendations one may receive from family and friends about destinations including hotels and points of interest. Social media about destinations potentially represents the next best form of recommendation after the experience of having visited or receiving feedback from family and friends located in the destination. The days of traditional travel guides written by strangers but experts impacting on destinations is limited as they too morph to embrace personalisation, sharing and the recommendations of community (http://traveldk.com/).
1. Gayle
2. Paige
3. Paris
4. "The occasion was my cousin Paige's 16th"
5. "I am a Canadian and get by in French."
6. "All I can say is WOW! We rented a 2 bedroom, 1 ½ bath apartment (two showers), "Merlot" from ParisPerfect http://www.parisperfect.com/ and boy was it ever perfect!"
7. "We had a full view of the Eiffel from our charming little terrace.... We were within walking distance to two metro stops (Pont’d’Alma or Ecole Militaire)"
8. "We were walkable to many good bistro, cafes and bakeries and only a few blocks from the wonderful market street Rue Cler."
9. "I bought a Paris Pratique pocket-sized book at a Metro station. This handy guide has detailed maps of each arrondisement, as well as the metro lines, the bus lines, the RER and the SCNF (trains). I’ll never be without this again."
10. "Six months before our trip, I gave Paige a couple of guide books on Paris and suggested she let me know what her interests were since after all, this was to be her trip."
11. Sites
   - The Marais
   - Notre Dame
   - Arc de Triomphe - 248 steps up and 248 steps down...
   - Champs Elysee
   - Jacquemart Museum
   - Louvre LIté
   - Musee D’Orsay
   - Les Invalides, Napoleon’s Tomb and the Napoleon Museum
   - Sacre Coeur
   - Montmartre
   - Rodin Museum
   - Pompidou Museum
   - Train to Vernon, bike to Giverny with Fat Tire Bike Tours
   - http://www.fattirebiketoursparis.com/
   - Eiffel Tower
12. Unforgettable Memories
   "This trip had so many memories, but here are a few choice highlights...... On our very first night, knowing that the Eiffel Tower light show started at 10:00 p.m.... she [Paige] dropped her camera...down 6 flights... we were stunned... Spanish Family below standing below [with pieces of the camera]"
13. "The father stretched out his cupped hands which held all of the pieces they were able to recover, including the memory stick and he very solemnly said, "El muerto....".
14. "They had decide to come to Paris to find the Harley Davidson store so they could buy Harley Paris t-shirts."
15. "Michael Osman is an American artists living in Paris."
   "He supplements his income by being a tour guide."
   "I found out about him on Fodor’s"
   "So I engaged Michael for two days."
16. "On our trip to Giverny, we met a young woman from Brisbane, Australia who was traveling on her own and we invited her to join us. Three of us enjoyed delicious and innovative soufflés, while Paige had the rack of lamb. We shared two dessert soufflés, one chocolate and the other cherry/almond. Yum"
17. "I wanted Paige to get a feel for shopping experiences that she would not have at home (aka the ubiquitous mall)"
18. "We went on Fat Tire’s day trip to Monet’s gardens and house in Giverny, about an hour outside Paris."
19. "I know Paige will treasure the memory of this girl’s trip for many years to come."

Figure 3 Paris Blog Story Analysis
REFERENCES


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