

Collective Knowledge, Individual Experience, and Sharing Strangers' Homes: The Effects of Digital Technologies on Tourism Consumption

Hailee A. Romain

A research Paper submitted to the University of Dublin, in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science Interactive Digital Media

2016

DECLARATION

I have read and I understand the plagiarism provisions in the General Regulations of the University Calendar for the current year, found at: <http://www.tcd.ie/calendar>.

I have also completed the Online Tutorial on avoiding plagiarism 'Ready, Steady, Write', located at <http://tcdie.libguides.com/plagiarism/ready-steady-write>.

I declare that the work described in this research Paper is, except where otherwise stated, entirely my own work and has not been submitted as an exercise for a degree at this or any other university.

Signed: _____

Hailee Romain

11 May 2016

PERMISSION TO LEND AND/OR COPY

I agree that Trinity College Library may lend or copy this research Paper upon request.

Signed: _____

Hailee Romain

11 May 2016

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thanks to Susan for her guidance, to my family for their helpful feedback and general support over the years, and to Ryan for his patience, assistance, and phenomenal cooking skills.

SUMMARY

This paper explores the effects of interactive digital media on the traditional tourism consumption cycle and proposes a new, original model that more accurately represents the ways in which travelers are now able to influence the diversification of tourism products.

The interactive elements of Web 2.0 technologies have enabled millennial travelers to act as co-producers of their own unique experiences rather than be limited by conventional tourism offerings. This paper traces the evolution of the shift from travelers as passive consumers to active “prosumers” of content, as well as the development of social media platforms that allowed this material to be distributed directly between peers. The paper then demonstrates the ways in which millennial travelers rely on user-generated content to aid in travel planning, and how they contribute collective travel knowledge by sharing their experiences via travel forums, social networking sites, and content communities. The degree to which these shared experiences differ from the portrayals of destination by marketers is used as a testament to the newfound power of the individual. It is proof that the conventional consumption cycle, controlled by marketers and represented by a hermeneutic circle, is outdated.

The author of this paper then proposes a new, expanded consumption model that takes into account the empowerment of travelers through interactive mobile technologies. This new relationship is represented by a spiral model that allows for the branching of experiences and the individualization of increasingly diverse tourism offerings. This model also reflects the inversion of the conventional consumer/producer power dynamic as destination marketers and managers find themselves in an increasingly responsive position. The validity of this model is demonstrated by the success of accommodation sharing, a recent phenomenon that embodies the tourism market’s response to travelers’ rejection of mass tourism.

TABLE OF FIGURES

| | |
|--|----|
| Figure 1: Hermeneutic Circle of Representation..... | 28 |
| Figure 2: Expanded cycle based on influence of UGC and social media | 32 |
| Figure 3: Airbnb homepage tout..... | 37 |

TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|---|----|
| Introduction | 1 |
| Chapter One: Tourism Studies and the Millennial Traveler | 5 |
| 1.1: Who is the next generation traveler? | 6 |
| 1.2: What is Travel 2.0?..... | 7 |
| Chapter Two: Web 2.0 and the Rise of User-Generated Content..... | 9 |
| 2.1: The Advent of Web 2.0 and Globalization..... | 9 |
| 2.2: User-Generated Content and Social Media..... | 12 |
| 2.3: Iterations and Evolutions of Social Media | 13 |
| Chapter Three: Travel and Social Media..... | 17 |
| 3.1: Social features of the tourism product | 17 |
| 3.2: Social media and the trip-planning process: the case of TripAdvisor | 20 |
| Chapter Four: Reimagining the Model of Travel Consumption..... | 26 |
| 4.1: Travel experience and the visual sense | 26 |
| 4.2: The hermeneutic circle of representation..... | 28 |
| 4.3: Technological effects on the traditional consumption cycle..... | 29 |
| 4.4: An improved consumption model..... | 31 |
| Chapter Five: Utilizing the Spiral Model: Accommodation Sharing and Airbnb..... | 34 |
| 5.1: The rise of Airbnb | 34 |
| 5.2: Accommodation sharing and the appeal to millennial desires | 35 |
| 5.3: Case in point: Airbnb and the “Live There” campaign..... | 36 |
| Conclusion | 39 |
| References | 42 |

ABBREVIATIONS

UGC: User-generated content

DMO: Destination marketing organization

eWOM: Electronic word-of-mouth

INTRODUCTION

This research paper answers the research question “how have digital media technologies have affected the consumption of tourism experiences?” I will begin by exploring the rise of democratic information production and the origin of user-generated content and social media platforms. I will then investigate the ways in which egalitarian information creation and distribution has empowered millennial travelers by giving them access to collective knowledge and has also constructed a “sharing economy” of both information and services that invites them to participate as co-creators. I will then demonstrate how this collaborative power shift has fundamentally altered the traditional model of tourism consumption.

Facilitated by digital technologies and peer-to-peer information sharing, travelers are able to research and pursue unique travel experiences, which largely deviate from the conventional offerings of mass tourism. Tourism marketers must increasingly adapt their products to suit consumer needs, rather than being able to drive the production cycle according to their own agendas. This marks a radical shift in the evolution of the tourism experience. Instead of a unidirectional relationship where destination marketers run the consumption process by creating products and distributing them to consumers, travelers now have the ability to influence content creation and dissemination. With social media platforms as distribution channels, word-of-mouth reviews are rapidly circulated amongst wide social networks, and each individual has equal influence over the success or failure of a tourism product. Companies are increasingly finding themselves in reactionary positions and having to appeal to the needs, desires, and feedback of every individual consumer.

Therefore, I propose a reinvented model for this paradigm, substituting the conventionally circular consumption model for one represented by an outwardly branching spiral in which tourism products and experiences are diversified and manipulated by the traveler. This new model, I will argue, has resulted in a diversification

of tourism offerings. I will then demonstrate the validity of my new consumption model by critically analyzing a recently launched marketing campaign and mobile app that directly appeal to travelers' desire for unique experiences.

From an economic point of view, the expanded consumption model I propose, as well as the relationships and power dynamics within it, is important for marketers, travelers, and tourism theorists to understand. As the evolution of technology continues to affect tourist behaviors, it is vital that destination marketers fully comprehend the power of user-generated content and the fundamentals of the sharing economy if they wish to capitalize on the revenue potential that is inherent in the next generation of traveler: millennials. The millennial generation is the largest to date, and studies show that the group places more importance on travel than any previous generation (PhoCusWright, 2014). Understanding the connections between peer-to-peer knowledge sharing and the diversification of tourism experiences will allow destination marketers to anticipate the desires of millennial travelers as the generation grows into its peak spending years. It is also important for tourism theorists and travelers to understand the fundamental shift in the consumption process that has made travelers the driving force behind developments in the tourism marketplace. Through co-collaboration and co-production, travelers have the ability to push the tourism marketers and service providers for more diverse and personalized products.

In the first chapter of this paper, I will provide background information about the theoretical study of tourism and discuss the complexities inherent in the field of tourism studies, especially with relevance to tourism's relationship with technology. I will also define millennial travelers and Travel 2.0 as they apply to the scope of this paper.

Chapter 2 will lend context to the argument for individual empowerment by exploring the technological advancements that allowed consumers to become co-producers of content. I will provide a brief overview of specific economic and media theories as a means of

exploring the ways in which Web 2.0 instigated a democratic shift in information creation and dissemination and promoted users' evolution from passive consumers of information to producer/consumer hybrids known as "prosumers." In doing so, I will trace the evolution of user-generated content and will define and explain the most influential platforms of social media as they are used within the travel sphere.

In Chapter 3, I examine the unique relationship between travel and electronic word-of-mouth, and will demonstrate more specifically the ways in which user-generated content allows travelers to research, pursue, and share unique experiences. I will also be investigating how mobile technologies now give travelers the flexibility to both plan and interact while on the actual trip—no longer is there the same pressure to plan the entire trip beforehand or wait until returning home to share with friends and family. I will be using the popular travel forum site TripAdvisor as an example of how technology is appealing to these new patterns of behavior.

In Chapter 4, I will propose my own revision to the traditional model of travel consumption. To do so, I will provide background on major tenets of tourism theory, including the relationship between tourism and visual imagery and the historic power dynamic between destination marketers and travelers. I will propose that the traditional paradigm of travel imagery as a hermeneutic circle with destination marketers in control should now be considered an outwardly expanding and branching spiral as tourism products become increasingly personalized, diversified, and focused on authentic experiences in light of democratized information production and user collaboration.

In Chapter 5, I will demonstrate how my expanded model of tourism consumption is exemplified by the evolution of accommodation sharing. Travelers' pursuit of more diverse and individualized experiences has led the market to respond with increasingly social and unique accommodation options. I will argue that accommodation sharing company Airbnb's newest app release and marketing campaign evolved as a direct result

of the new consumption pattern, embodies the expectations of empowered millennial travelers, and acts as a physical manifestation of the user-centered, mobile, and personalized experience that travelers have already become familiar with online.

CHAPTER ONE: TOURISM STUDIES AND THE MILLENNIAL TRAVELER

Tourism is an inherently complex phenomenon and can be viewed through any number of social, historical, cultural, technological contexts (Mazor-Tregerman et al., 2015). As such, the theories and methodologies that form the framework of the academic study of tourism have come within the purview of a number of disciplines over the years, including economics, marketing, anthropology, sociology, geography, and psychology (Mazor-Tregerman et al., 2015, p. 11). Though Mazor-Tregerman, et. al. argue that this results in a fragmented body of knowledge that prevents tourism from being taken seriously as a scholarly discipline in and of itself, by using a critical eye it is possible to extract from overlapping frameworks and draw parallels between various ideologies. This is especially true when examining the evolution of the relationship between technology and travel behaviors. In taking a holistic view of the interplay between technology and tourism, it is important to understand that travel patterns are an adaptive behavior in response to technological innovations, and that there is a co-evolution within and between such sociotechnical systems wherein these systems are continually influencing each other (Xiang et al., 2015b).

The advent of Web 2.0, an umbrella term for the socio-technical shift whereby the Internet evolved from a tool of passive consumption to one of active participation, has had huge effects on many aspects of our day-to-day lives. Under this new paradigm shift, Internet technologies began to increasingly promote user interaction and interpersonal computing. Within the realm of travel and tourism, social media and mobile computing paved the way for a new form of knowledge sharing built on user-generated content and direct peer-to-peer relationships known as a “sharing economy” (Rainie, 2015). In this new “sharing economy,” users are able to exchange ideas and services faster, more fluidly, and across longer distances than ever before. By increasing collective knowledge, this sharing economy has provided travelers with the ability to visit more exotic attractions and to plan trips based on their personal interests (Wang et al., 2016). These advancements have

coincided with the emergence of the millennial tourist, who has specific and particular expectations of travel.

1.1 - Who is the next generation traveler?

For the purposes of this paper, millennial travelers are 18-30 years of age, digital natives, and Internet experts who expect mobile information access and are heavy social media users (PhoCusWright, 2014). They crave customized and differentiated plans, preferably ones that they helped co-create (Amadeus, 2013). Millennials place more importance on travel than older generations and are more likely to journey internationally and take spontaneous trips than their predecessors (PhoCusWright, 2014). It is important to note that millennials consider the “tourist” a derisive categorization of someone who seems content with inauthentic experiences by himself or others, and therefore prefer the label of “traveler” (MacCannell, 1999).

As the first generation to grow up with Web 2.0 as an intrinsic part of life, millennials are inherently familiar with the proliferation of information that current technologies provide. They are accustomed to aggregating and synthesizing large numbers of sources, and these information-processing patterns are fundamental to the way they gather information and form opinions. As Tapscott & Williams explain:

Rather than being passive recipients of mass consumer culture, [millennials] spend time searching, reading, scrutinizing, authenticating, collaborating, and organizing. The Internet makes life an ongoing, massive collaboration, and this generation loves it. They typically can't imagine a life where citizens didn't have the tools to constantly think critically, exchange views, challenge, authenticate, verify, or debunk. While their parents were passive consumers of

media, youth today are active creators of media content and hungry for interaction (2006, p. 47).

Previous generations, limited by the physical restrictions of printed encyclopedias and analogue social networks, were able to consult a comparatively paltry number of sources during their research processes. But online, people cannot only access the collective knowledge of billions, but make their own additions, as well. Millennials are encouraged to take opportunities to create media content and share experiences with their social networks. These same information collection and sharing processes are used in the modern travel experience.

1.2 - What is Travel 2.0?

Due mainly to the technology necessary to connect travel agencies with airlines, the travel industry was one of the leaders of technological innovation in the first decade of the Internet (Xiang et al., 2015a, p. 245). But until the rise of interactivity that evolved alongside Web 2.0, the information flow and travel process was mostly unidirectional: potential travelers met with travel agents, who would book travel and accommodation for them and provide solid itineraries to be followed during the trip. Over the last decade and a half, however, customers have grown increasingly empowered. Individuals can now research airfare and accommodation, book tickets, and research attractions themselves. Itineraries are more flexible, and the rise of travel forums and the introduction of smartphones allows users to control their travel experience anytime, anywhere (Xiang et al., 2015a, p. 245). The era of mass tourism, when groups of individuals went on package tours with little to no flexibility in their schedules, has given way to a period of unique, personalized experiences.

In more technical terms, Travel 2.0 is the tourism iteration of Web 2.0. It is a social and technological evolution that brought forth a new interactive approach to travel

technologies, including web forums, message boards, customer ratings systems, blogs, and online photos and videos (Yoo and Gretzel, 2012, p. 191). Characterized by the facilitation and encouragement of knowledge sharing across national borders and directly between peers, Travel 2.0 is built on collective intelligence, and relies heavily on the creation and dissemination of user-generated content (Edwards et al., 2016, p. 6). This content may take the form of a rating, comment, or graphical documentation as travelers look to the web to obtain or share experiences or information about destinations (Parra-Lopez et al., 2012, p. 172).

Though largely influenced and facilitated by technological developments like broadband and mobile computing, the foundational power of Web 2.0 and the resultant Travel 2.0 technologies is the egalitarian mode of information sharing where users not only consume content, but have the ability to produce and disseminate it as well. At its core, the new model of tourism consumption stems from an evolution of democratic information production.

CHAPTER TWO: WEB 2.0 AND THE RISE OF USER-GENERATED CONTENT

The international communication channels that developed alongside Web 2.0 have brought about huge changes in the way people live, think, and identify themselves in terms of geography (Kellner and Share, 2009). The facilitation of a virtually borderless global network of information producers and participators has “fragmented, connected, converged, diversified, homogenized, flattened, broadened, and reshaped the world” (Kellner and Share, 2009, p. 282). This chapter will trace the evolution of Web 2.0 and briefly discuss the wider cultural effects of the phenomenon using a combination of classic media and economic theories. It will also explore the prolific and diverse types of information sources, today known as social media platforms, which these technologies encouraged. Finally, it will examine the general roles of some of these social media platforms within the travel sphere.

2.1 – The Advent of Web 2.0 and Globalization

Prior to the Internet, most knowledge was shared through printed books and therefore limited by the physical restrictions of paper and ink. In free countries during this time, information production was controlled by a representative democracy (Levinson, 2013). A handful of intellectual elites acted as knowledge “gatekeepers,” determining what and how much content would live within the pages of information sources like encyclopedias. A wider audience could consume the information, but could not easily publish (Levinson, 2013, p. 2). Even well after the World Wide Web was introduced, opportunities for information creation remained within the purview of a few elites who were trained in computer science systems. But the shift to Web 2.0 in the 1990s saw a cumulative change in the way web pages were made and used. Suddenly, any person with Internet access had the ability to influence the production and distribution of content, melding the idea of

“consumers” and “producers” to form “prosumers,” a term first coined by Alvin Toffler (1980).

By allowing for the creation and dissemination of information without oversight, “[digital media] put an enormous amount of power into the hands of the individual” (Levinson, 2013, p. 2). Communication was “no longer top-down but also bottom-up and even cut across social structures” (Tewksbury and Rittenberg, 2012, p. 150). In this new technological order:

[the user] becomes not only the major source of raw experiential data input and the cognitive engine that translates that data into meaning, but also the control centre for its distribution and use: a true egalitarian world of information (Volo, 2012, p. 149).

With a proliferation of content producers, what had previously been a hierarchically structured, trickle-down system of information became a more level and democratic field. As the information flow changed from a few-to-many to a many-to-many model, theorists contemplated the social repercussions of such a power shift.

With Web 2.0, previously disparate societies were transformed and interconnected. Geographically separate individuals became members of the “global village” envisioned by media theorist Marshall McLuhan (Levinson, 1999). In accordance with McLuhan’s vision, these online villagers live anywhere in the world, and “with a personal computer, a telephone line, and a Web browser, engage in dialogue, seek out rather than merely receive news stories, and in general exchange information across the globe much like the inhabitants of any village or stadium” (Levinson, 1999, p. 7). Thanks to the evolution of worldwide connectedness, geographic location and national borders no longer placed limitations on the exchange of ideas and information. This enabled the Internet to become a source of collective knowledge, linking individuals around the world and ushering in a new era of global economic change.

As Thomas Friedman argued, the advent of Web 2.0 brought the world to a stage of globalization marked by “the newfound power of the *individuals* to collaborate and compete globally” (2005, p. 10). In this new era, Friedman argued, the world was a level playing field where countries, companies, and individuals were given equal opportunity. Though Friedman was criticized for having an “overly idealistic” view of globalization and of being “too uncritical of inequalities and injustices” of globalization, he was right to argue that historical and geographical divisions are becoming increasingly irrelevant (Kellner and Share, 2009, p. 284). While inequalities will always exist, Web 2.0 made the power to shape information more accessible than it had ever been. In free countries, such technologies shifted the balance of power from a small group of content producers and controllers to billions of individuals. To this day, where inequalities still exist, they are more likely to be due to technical limitations than a lack of skill or disenfranchisement. As Tewksbury and Rittenberg explain, “becoming a news anchor requires experience, but creating a news channel on YouTube requires merely a video camera and an internet connection” (2012, p. 9). Technical limitations aside, every individual has the power to access and add to the collective knowledge of the Internet. With this ability, average users are now able to influence the development of products that they had heretofore only consumed.

Such influence means that companies must now be concerned with the satisfaction of every individual consumer, so it has become beneficial for many companies to integrate consumers into the economic development process. In 2006, Tapscott and Williams theorized that the collective intelligence of the masses could be harnessed to change how goods and services were invented and distributed on a global scale. In this new world, the authors wrote, “knowledge, power, and productive capability will be more dispersed than any time in our history—value creation will be fast and fluid, [. . .] and only the connected will survive” (2006, p. 12). Over the past decade, this shift has been slowly growing. More and more companies are encouraging consumer co-collaboration, crowdsourcing, and

open innovation into their development models (Egger et al., 2016). While there are differences between these three models, for the purposes of this paper they can be collectively characterized by the utilization of the wisdom of the masses. Instead of a linear model where a corporation makes decisions to which the consumer must then react, consumer knowledge is used to initiate the innovation process, and products are adapted based on consumer feedback prior to being fully developed. This co-creation of value often increases the ultimate value of the product for the business (Rowley et al., 2007). As such, the empowerment of consumers as co-creators of their experiences has become something that businesses should try to achieve (Neuhofer, 2016). In order to take full advantage of the possibility for consumer participation in the production process, it is necessary to understand the ways in which Web 2.0 technologies enable such social interactions.

2.2 -User-Generated Content and Social Media

By being ideologically as well as structurally built on the assumptions of collective intelligence, Web 2.0 can be considered “inherently social” (Gretzel, 2012). This paradigm is based on the participation of numerous individuals who share knowledge in online virtual communities. Constructed around a shared interest or common attribute and thus attracting like-minded members, individuals in these crowds often have an affinity for each other (Molz, 2012, p. 176). Within these groups, users exchange knowledge and experiences in the form of user-generated content (UGC). This material can be textual or graphical, but according to Kaplan and Haenlein, must fulfill three following requirements:

First, it needs to be published either on a publicly accessible website or on a social networking site accessible to a selected group of people; second, it needs to show a certain amount of creative effort; and finally, it needs to have been created outside of professional routines and practices (2010, p. 61).

Therefore, it excludes emails and instant messages, simple sharing of content without commentary, and commercial materials. In other words, user-generated content can be defined as something that individuals create in their own time and mean to share with others. Over time, UGC and technology have symbiotically evolved, resulting in the development of the modern-day social media platform.

Today's social media can be defined as a digital communication system that allows users to share content and interact with a network of others. Social media platforms have created a timely, direct, and personalized information exchange system that exists without regard to national or social borders. They "allow real time [. . .] sharing among network members, thus vastly facilitating communication, knowledge exchange, social interaction, and collaboration not only at the regional and national level but globally as well" (Christou and Nella, 2012, p. 12). These platforms can manifest themselves in many ways, but all serve to enable connections between users, provide a space where ideas can grow and spread, and are universally accessible. As Levinson writes, "just as YouTube in America is available both to heads of state and to people on the street, [. . .] so, too, is YouTube internationally available to more than the Queen of England and the Pope" (Levinson, 2013, p. 63). Neuhofer argues that the engaging nature of social media means that "co-creation between individuals is maximized, with interactions having exploded on an unprecedented scale" (2016, p. 24). It is these interactions that serve as the foundation for user empowerment, as they provide an avenue for the dissemination of user-generated material. In the travel and tourism sphere, these online social connections have mobilized and mediated the way that tourists experience travel (Molz, 2012).

2.3 – Iterations and Evolutions of Social Media

There are a number of social media platforms currently utilized in the millennial travel process for research and sharing. These include collaborative projects, blogs, content communities, forums/reviews, and social networking sites. These platforms provide a

wide range of tools for peer-to-peer engagement and encourage the participation of consumers, who are able to interact, collaborate, and share content, opinions, and experiences with each other (Neuhofner, 2016).

Collaborative online projects, commonly known as wikis, allow users to add, remove, and edit text-based content on a number of topics (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010). In theory, the projects are based on an egalitarian system and all users have equal ability to influence the information on the site. In reality, however, some users have more or less power to edit based on their experience and ratings. On English Wikipedia, the most popular wiki, 1,307 administrators are responsible for the site's 28 million users ("Wikipedia," 2016). Though this inequality detracts slightly from the democratic nature of the platform, it ensures that the entries, which are often "teeming with false entries by pranksters, [. . .] are quickly fixed by readers and editors" (Levinson, 2013, p. 66). Collaborative projects tend to perform well in search results and can therefore be influential in helping travelers compare different destinations in the planning process (Inversini and Buhalis, 2009; Xiang et al., 2015a).

Forums and review sites are also playing an increasingly large role in the travel planning process. In travel forums, individuals united by a common interest are able to pose personal questions, share photos and videos, as well as rate accommodation, attractions, and dining experiences. Many of the individuals involved in these travel forums are locals themselves, who act as travel experts to answer questions of others (Edwards et al., 2016). Forums differ from other social media spaces in that they usually contain short questions and answers that help users at a specific, personalized level. Cohesive information is generated by the collective knowledge of the network, and is often based on opinions and personal experiences. Many travel forums have now evolved to include booking functionalities within the forum sites themselves, making these a one-stop-shop for travel planners. I will explore this idea further in Chapter 4, using the travel forum site TripAdvisor as an example.

While these platforms enable interpersonal communication and knowledge sharing on an unprecedented scale, there are significant drawbacks to note when basing decisions solely on user-generated content. Though in theory the opportunity for egalitarian participation should make the information system more representative, the system is more complex in practice. In the years before Web 2.0, the elite “gatekeepers” who controlled the information available to the masses were also *responsible* for the knowledge and often had an economic interest in ensuring its accuracy. For historically trusted travel guidebook brands like Fodor’s, Rough Guides, and Lonely Planet, success has depended on the perceived integrity and usability of the information contained within their pages (Fursich, 2002). Writers and editors had a financial stake in ensuring that the printed facts were truthfully conveyed.

The individual users who post on social media sites, however, lack these same economic stakes and have less to lose by writing and disseminating inaccurate or biased information, which can lessen the reliability of the entire platform. There is no guarantee that photos in a review haven’t been doctored in some way, that the user answering a forum post has any actual experience traveling in that city, or that a Wikipedia entry is correct. By allowing users an equal control of the messaging but refusing them a tangible economic stake in the product, individual policing is the only barrier to the information getting out of hand. But the opportunities inherent in a democratic system are arguably worth the risk: Web 2.0 has allowed for a diversification and proliferation of information unlike anything possible from traditional sources. As John Milton argued, the risk of inaccurate information should never overshadow people’s right to free speech, for “who ever knew Truth put to the worse in a free and open encounter?” (1644). Still, travelers need to be aware of the potential pitfalls of depending on user-generated content for travel research.

Users can ensure the overall integrity of social media platforms by creating their own material to disseminate on social media platforms. This can be content for communities like YouTube and Instagram, social networking sites like Facebook and Twitter, or blogging platforms like Tumblr and Wordpress. All of these sites allow users to both benefit from and add to the collective experience and knowledge of others, and with Facebook's daily users topping one billion, those social networks have proven to be large, diverse, and far-reaching ("Facebook Newsroom," 2016).

Social platforms have become more deeply personalized and entwined with the travel process as mobile technologies have increased the ability of users to access these platforms during trips. By allowing travelers to stay connected with friends and family while away, these technologies have all contributed to a more immediate, interactive form of experience sharing. In Chapter 3, I will delve further into the role of social media in the planning and sharing stages of travel and the influence of mobile technologies on the flexibility of travel plans, demonstrating these points with a real-life example.

CHAPTER THREE: TRAVEL AND SOCIAL MEDIA

In the previous chapter, I established that the development of Web 2.0 enabled knowledge sharing between individuals and encouraged the shift from consumers to “prosumers.” I also briefly described how travelers use social media in the travel process to both plan and share their experiences. In this chapter, I will examine how travel is uniquely positioned to benefit from electronic word-of-mouth and how user-generated content and mobile technologies influence travelers’ behaviors. To do this, I will be using the popular travel forum site TripAdvisor as an example.

3.1 – Social features of the tourism product

Tourism information is uniquely positioned to benefit from democratically sourced, user-generated content because it is inherently intangible (Xiang et al., 2015a). Traveling by its very nature is experiential, and because such products cannot be physically reviewed or examined before purchase, consumers “tend to rely heavily on word of mouth from an experienced source to lower perceived risk and uncertainty” (Gretzel and Yoo, 2008, p. 36). Traditionally, this word-of-mouth feedback would have consisted of personal experiences shared in person and circulated through a small circle of friends and family. In the era of Web 2.0, however, that network has widened exponentially. Now, travelers interact on a global scale with communities of individuals with whom they may not have any real-world ties. In these virtual travel communities, people are able to obtain information, maintain connections, and eventually make decisions based on individualized feedback and electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) from the wider network. As such, word-of-mouth is quickly becoming an important source of information in the travel planning process (Gretzel and Yoo, 2008).

Reviews are one of the most prevalent forms of eWOM within the travel sphere. Because reviews rely on the participation of consumers, are viewable to other potential buyers,

and are able to influence purchasing decisions, they embody the ideal of a democratized information model and innately place the consumer in the position of power. As Blank writes, “elites will find it difficult to monopolize control over cultural capital in any field where reviews are common” (Blank, 2006, p. 19). More than three-quarters of travelers consult online reviews when planning trips, and 88% of those who consult reviews have their decisions affected by what they see (Tuominen, 2011, p. 3). Travelers consider eWOM communications inherently more trustworthy, relevant, and up-to-date than traditional marketing materials, as its perceived that other users have less to gain from positive reviews than the destination marketers or managers (Gretzel and Yoo, 2008). Information gathered from reviews impacts traveler decisions not only on traditional products like lodging and attractions, but less monetarily valuable decisions like museum tickets or handicrafts as well (Xiang et al., 2015b, p. 520). As social media broadens the scope of traditional word-of-mouth, “managers have lost control over content and frequency of communication” (Volo, 2012, p. 151). Travelers are utilizing eWOM avenues like reviews to take advantage of their new power as prosumers.

Access to eWOM and social media platforms has significantly altered tourists’ involvement in all stages of the travel process. Prior to the rise of Web 2.0, travel planning was the responsibility of travel agents (who can be considered “gatekeepers” of information), months before the traveler was set to leave. During this time, the travel agent made reservations, constructed itineraries, and booked accommodations. There was little flexibility during the trip for last-minute adjustments, and the sharing of experiences (usually involving photos) after the trip was done personally and face-to-face with a group of friends and family. Now, however, technology plays a role in each of the three stages of travel. Tourists in the pre-consumption stage are able to research information about their holiday, form expectations, compare alternatives, and select the activities and accommodations that interest him or her most. The consumption of the tourist experience involves connecting to social platforms and peer reviews on the web to find detailed information on specific activities and resources. In the post-consumption

stage, tourists share their experiences with others, reliving moments from the holiday and impacting the decisions of other potential tourists, thus continuing the cycle (Parra-Lopez et al., 2012).

Mobile technologies have added an additional layer of complexity to the relationship between travelers and social media. More than 88% of travelers now use mobile devices while on holiday (BDRC Continental, 2014). The increased affordability of smartphones, proliferation of mobile broadband and Wi-Fi, and decreased cost of mobile data roaming mean that tourists have near-constant access to eWOM content. This means that behaviors that would have traditionally been exhibited solely in the planning or sharing stages can now be performed during the trip itself (Minazzi and Mauri, 2015). Experiences can be shared with social networks while traveling, allowing for more interactivity as travelers respond to the comments of others and adjust plans based on feedback and advice that influences the remainder of their travels. Mobile technologies also allow travelers to react to unexpected occurrences and use GPS-enabled devices to take advantage of location-based services that are not available in traditional guidebooks.

For many travelers, these location-based services mean a lessening of risk and an increase in trip flexibility. It is no longer necessary to buy printed maps to navigate your way around a city. Instead, GPS-based services tell you exactly where you are and how to get there. This means less of a chance of getting lost or wandering into an unsafe neighborhood, and more localized advice about what to do in the area you're in (Wang et al., 2011). As Wang and Fesenmaier explain, "the use of smartphones can create spontaneous deviations such as the changes of travel route, duration, and walking distance" (2013, p. 60). This expands the amount of territory in destinations available to tourists, and opens up neighborhoods typically reserved for locals.

In addition, the immediacy of today's mobile technologies has shifted the entire travel experience to be more interactive. Because travel is a fundamentally mobile experience, it

is especially well-equipped for interpersonal communication to occur online as opposed to face-to-face. Followers of travel blogs, for example, can communicate directly with bloggers through comments they make on posts, though they may have never met in real life. Many of the people following these travel blogs are fellow travelers currently on the road, who are planning to take long trips, or have previously traveled similar routes (Molz, 2012). Through blogs, travelers can advise each other on current situations in different destinations and collaborate by directly sharing insider information.

Galvanized by the plethora of technology available at their fingertips at all stages of the travel experience, travelers are eschewing packaged tours for personalized experiences that follow their own preferences and schedules (Buhalis and Law, 2008). Younger generations of travelers, especially, are much more active and engaged in travel planning. They make use of information and communication devices on the Internet, are more flexible with their travel plans, consider more potential destinations, and actively look for things to do that appeal to their personal sensibilities while in a certain place (Xiang et al., 2015a). Many destination marketers and travel organizations are in the midst of adapting to this new dynamic and adjusting their offerings and messages to appeal to these new trends.

3.2- Social media and the trip-planning process: the case of TripAdvisor

With the spreading out of information sources and content producers, travel forums and review sites have become important platforms for individuals to gather and synthesize information during the trip-planning process. Social media and UGC provide today's travelers with a plethora of information and the opportunity for choice. Until recently, consumers had access mainly to major brands and organizations within their physical reach. With the broad range of content and opportunity for detail, these sites also give travelers the opportunity to build personalized itineraries based on their own

preferences. Examples of this can be observed by taking a critical look at TripAdvisor, one of the largest and most successful virtual communities in tourism (Buhalis and Law, 2008).

The scope of TripAdvisor is embodied in the site's tagline, "Read Reviews, Compare Prices, Book Your Best Trip" ("TripAdvisor," 2016). The site allows individuals to construct personal profiles, upload photos, videos, and written experiences, research forums for specific countries and cities, and even book airfare and accommodation right on the site. With an international network of co-collaborators, TripAdvisor has more than 350 million unique monthly visitors from all over the world and boasts more than 320 million reviews covering 6.2 million accommodations, restaurants, and attractions ("TripAdvisor Fact Sheet," 2016).

The sheer amount of user-generated content on the site may be even more impressive: more than 2,600 new topics are posted every day on TripAdvisor forums, and over 200 new contributions are posted every minute ("TripAdvisor Fact Sheet," 2016). On the forum section of the site, users can post specific questions about destinations and have them answered by other users who generally know the answer through experience. These questions can be general, about the types of restaurant offerings in a particular neighborhood, or incredibly specific—"Is it possible to hire motorbikes with a surfboard rack" is a question on the Ubud, Indonesia, forum ("Ubud Forum - TripAdvisor," 2016). These residents or frequent visitors "who are friendly and offer good advice are accorded 'destination expert' status" (Edwards et al., 2016, p. 8). Some researchers believe that the "expert" title can be problematic in light of the fact that the individuals sometimes have no real credentials, or any concrete proof that the advice they impart is factual. In their study of the co-produced travel forum site TripAdvisor, Edwards, et. al. argue that locals "camouflaging" themselves as travel experts in such a way can be problematic, they fail to take into account that sometimes, users want and prefer the local opinion to that of a travel expert (2016). The very fact that locals take pride in their homes and impart advice

and information to hopeful travelers is a testament to the extent to which user-generated content and social media have become part of the travel experience.

In addition to the user-generated content, the site offers curated listicles of varied and increasingly specific categories. The “Best of 2016” offers lists of destinations based on specific characteristics that travelers are looking for: Beaches, Islands, Destinations, Landmarks, or Destinations on the Rise, just to name a few. Each city has its own page where users can access information on hotels, holiday rentals, flights, restaurants, and things to do. Clicking on a specific attraction or hotel brings up its own page, from which users can directly book attraction tours, look at maps, see an aggregated list of keywords about the attraction, read full-length peer reviews with details about the places, and access a Q&A section. They also offer commissioned guides to different areas, each of which are tagged with the characteristics of the travelers for whom they’re the most well-suited: tags like “peace and quiet seeker”, “must see”, “history buff”, “thrill seeker”, or “nature lover”. Attractions on the guides vary in popularity and size, but doubtless their inclusion affects the tourist numbers at the site.

The “TripAdvisor Key Features” highlighted on the site advertise the opportunity for personalized travel planning. The site boasts “Just For You’ Personalization,” where the users’ individual preferences and travel research history provides more personalized hotel recommendations. The “Travel Inspiration” section invites users to pick specific trip attributes like “adventure,” “wellness,” “shopping,” or “romance,” and are presented with a list of possible destinations based on the general geographic area of their choosing. There is also a TripWatch feature, where users can sign up for customized, time-sensitive email alerts about deals at specific hotels, attractions, and destinations. The “Tours” feature, present on each attraction’s page, lists three tour options for the attraction. There are, says the website, “small group, private, or skip-the-line options, along with descriptions and prices for each” (“TripAdvisor Fact Sheet,” 2016). These additional options are further examples of the shift away from mass tourism to a more individualized pattern of travel

planning, and support TripAdvisor's corporate mission to "help travelers around the world plan and have the perfect trip" (Yoo et al., 2016, p. 243). Their strategy for doing so is to facilitate the exchange and collection of travel information amongst different stakeholders (Yoo et al., 2016, p. 243).

As the company has evolved, these different stakeholders have become not just the users, but destination marketers as well. TripAdvisor content has been shown to have a direct effect on travelers' planning process, and destinations are quickly realizing that positive reviews can be a lucrative part of their business model (Yoo et al., 2016). In 2009, a study found that TripAdvisor had an estimated effect worth nearly \$850 million U.S. per annum on corporate travel spending (Tuominen, 2011, p. 4). A number of studies have focused on how destinations can capitalize on the popularity of review sites to garner more customers (Mavragani and Kladou, 2015; Yoo et al., 2016). At this stage, the site not only gives travelers a platform to search and share reviews, but also enables tourist suppliers to better understand their customers, promote their products, and keep an eye on the competition (Yoo et al., 2016, p. 250). Destination managers now have the opportunity to respond to customer complaints and address problems in real time as they arise (Gretzel and Yoo, 2008). In this way, TripAdvisor is not only changing the travel sphere by promoting a user-empowered information flow, but affecting the marketing strategies of businesses as well by utilizing user input to affect innovation.

One of TripAdvisor's major strengths is its appeal to a mobile audience, which comprises a large fraction of site traffic. According to the TripAdvisor Fact Sheet, more than 50% of users visited the site via a mobile device, and the number is continually increasing (2016). TripAdvisor's mobile app has been downloaded 290 million times and has been designed for the interactive, mobile, individualized traveler. Travelers can book accommodation or travel tickets within the app, making it a one-stop-shop for research and action. To enable the most consistent access, much of the information within the app is designed to be

available offline, since although cellular data is becoming increasingly affordable, roaming charges can still be prohibitive to use.

TripAdvisor's "Neighborhoods" feature is aimed towards the millennial travelers who want to be able to experience places as locals do. The feature offers curated content about restaurants, attractions, and accommodations within specific neighborhoods in a place. This allows the traveler to decide which part of town best suits their interests and where to spend the majority of his or her time: if they're interested in art, they can stay in the more cultural neighborhoods, if they prefer history, the TripAdvisor app will show them where to stay in the historical center. It allows for a much more cultivated experience on the part of the traveler. The "Travel Timeline," which automatically creates a timeline of the places travelers have visited and the photos they've taken at each location, allows users to quickly and easily share their experiences with friends and family, or even with strangers who are other TripAdvisor users to help them plan their trips.

An important caveat to the cycle of production and consumption of user-generated content on the TripAdvisor site is that it is completely dependent on the participation of its users. Democracy is based on the majority view of the whole, and it is then vital that the whole participate. Otherwise, the view is skewed. While a large number of travelers consult UGC in their trip-planning process, it is a much smaller percentage who actually create the content (Yoo and Gretzel, 2011). According to a study by Yoo and Gretzel, travel social media creators tend to be young, have higher incomes and greater internet skills, and are likely frequent travelers and highly involved in trip planning (2012, p. 194). Though this elevated level of social media experience and interaction and the heightened value placed on travel is a trend amongst most millennials, it is important to note possible discrepancies in the information sources (PhoCusWright, 2014). A number of studies have been done to determine the factors that influence participation in online communities, and companies that work closely with travel communities need to stay aware of these factors in order to encourage greater participation and representation in their sites.

This chapter has demonstrated how travel is uniquely constructed to be influenced by electronic word-of-mouth, and has explored the ways in which social media platforms and mobile technologies have facilitated travelers' directing of information flow in the travel planning and sharing processes. From the example of TripAdvisor, one can see how the travel industry is adapting to the travel behaviors of millennial travelers. In the following chapter, I will demonstrate that the production and power of user-generated content necessitates a reimagining of the traditional tourism consumption cycle. I will propose that the conventional consumption model should be expanded and investigate the ramifications for future tourism research.

CHAPTER FOUR: REIMAGINING THE MODEL OF TRAVEL CONSUMPTION

In this chapter, I will suggest that changes in information production and dissemination, as well as the advent of user-generated content and social media platforms, have caused a fundamental shift in the consumption of the travel experience. I will propose that the consumption cycle, traditionally imagined as a closed circle with destination marketers as initiators, has evolved to make the traveler both initiator and experiencer, and how this has encouraged a proliferation and diversification of tourism offerings. To do this, one must first understand some of the prevailing theories in tourism today, including the relationship between travel and visual experience.

4.1 – Travel experience and the visual sense

The concepts of tourism and photography have been intertwined since their co-evolution in the 19th century, and many tourism theorists agree that the root of many travel experiences are inherently visual (Scarles, 2014; Urry and Larsen, 2011). In 1990, tourism theorist John Urry first proposed the theory of the “tourist gaze” to articulate the separation of the tourist journey from “real life” and to describe the ways that tourists experience travel and perceive what they see while traveling (2011). In his classic text, he argued that in the postmodern age, the distinction between “representation” and “reality” is dissolved, and travelers consume images in place of experience (Larsen, 2014). As a physical representation of visual experience, photography becomes fundamental in “making sense of and experiencing, producing, and consuming places” (Scarles, 2014, p. 325). In a tangible sense, photography plays many roles in traveling, including placing the traveler at the center of the travel experience, proving that the individual physically visited a given place, and helping to construct travel memories into narratives (Inversini et al., 2016).

Because visuals are consumed as indicators of embodied travel experiences, audiences use images to construct imagined realities of destinations. The ideas of visual and embodied experience are inextricably linked, and as Caroline Scarles writes, “the visual [is] inherently embedded within embodied performances and practices of tourism experience” (2014, p. 325). The relationship between photography and travel was traditionally thought of as being cyclical and completely controlled by destination marketers. These marketers, acting as the information gatekeepers, manipulated the images of the destinations portrayed to the masses and “purposely determine the gaze through which places became recognizable, familiar, appealing, and achievable” (Scarles, 2014, p. 327). Urry (2011) argued that tourism is produced and reproduced with ‘socially constructed meaning,’ where the tourist gaze is “designed and deployed by destinations’ focusing on a series of iconic places and it is distributed via various media channels” (Inversini et al., 2016, p. 2).

Tourists form images of destinations based on the way places are marketed, as well as how destinations are depicted in popular culture. In fact, there is a direct correlation between the locations of pop culture film and television and the popularity of those sites as tourist destinations--for example, tourism numbers at Devil’s Tower in Wyoming skyrocketed 74% after its depiction in *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* (Tooke and Baker, 1996, p. 88). Indeed, “a movie may generate and sustain interest in a destination in a way which destination marketers cannot afford to do” (Tooke and Baker, 1996). Destination marketers are being encouraged to use film tourism as an alternative to more expensive, traditional marketing methods, especially now that travel is shifting to become a more democratic form of leisure and is reaching a wider audience.

Once mass media introduced such destination images into society, Urry said, the general public would reproduce the constructed geographies. In this cycle, he said, “the role of personal travelers’ photography [acts as] a reinforcement of the tourist gaze with travelers showing their version of the images they’ve seen before” (Inversini et al., 2016).

In other words, consumers would ingest the images fed to them by destination marketers and reproduce them through their own photography upon arriving at a destination.

4.2 - *The hermeneutic circle of representation*

According to Hall (1997), travelers would sustain these imagined geographies in a hermeneutic circle of tourism consumption and reproduction. In her observations of travel photography (which can be expanded to including moving image as well), Joan Schwartz observes that, “as part of the process by which [. . .] metaphors become more real than their referents, photographs--themselves cultural constructs--support the ‘virtual witnessing’ of landscape; depiction, picturing and seeing are ubiquitous features of the process by which most human beings come to know the world as it really is for them” (Schwartz, 1996, p. 36). Travelers would plan their trips around visiting these sites, which they photograph upon arrival. After the trip, travelers share these images with friends and family, who would sustain the marketer-induced cycle by constructing imagined geographies based off of the shared experiences. This process, and the role of destination marketers within it, is explained by Figure 1, below:

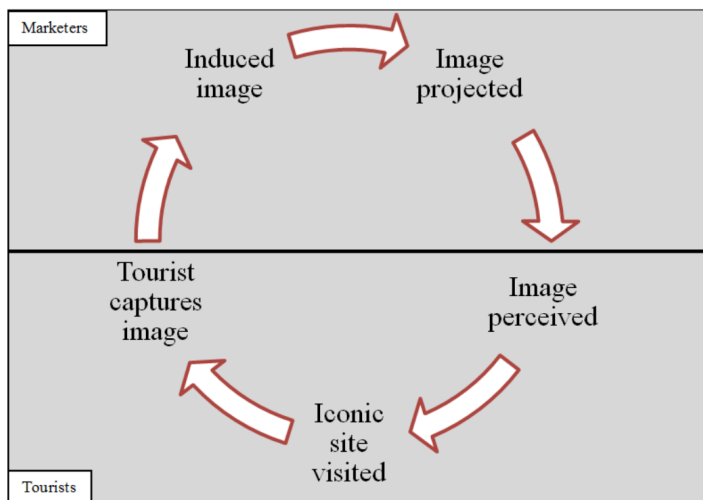


Figure 1: Hermeneutic Circle of Representation
Source: Ruane, 2014

Lacking today's technologies, this traditional consumption cycle was unidirectional and failed to account for individual perceptions and beliefs. Travel experiences are far from uniform and are shaped by personality, interest, and curiosity (Urry and Larsen, 2011). As Ruane explains, "Hall's circle of representation implies a pattern of behaviour that does not acknowledge the human element in tourism, in that what one tourist might consider iconic in terms of images used to promote the destination, another may not" (2014, p. 61). It was not until recently, however, that users had the necessary facilities to promote their own unique experiences.

4.3 – Technological effects on the traditional consumption cycle

The hermeneutic circle made sense in an era where information was controlled and technological limitations restricted the images that tourists could capture and share, but new technologies have rendered the traditional representation obsolete. Digital cameras have revolutionized the way that people relate to imagery. Unlike film, which acted as an information gatekeeper by being prohibitively expensive and difficult to master, digital cameras bring the ability to capture individual images and experiences to the masses. Like information, images and experiences have become democratized without film's economic and technological barriers. Travelers are now able to "keep or discard in accordance with ideological preferences of both the destination and self" (Scarles, 2014, p. 330). With these images to help them re-construct their travel narratives, they are able to remember and share even the least traditionally "iconic" aspects of their trips.

The hermeneutic relationship has quickly become outdated as social and technological abilities evolve to allow travelers portray destinations in ways that deviate from the marketed message. Some socially shared images differ greatly from DMO portrayals, allowing consumers to challenge traditional destination images (Inversini et al., 2016; Marine-Roig and Clave, 2016). Lo et. al. give the example of the Flinders Ranges in Australia. Marketing images for this destination showed people and wilderness together,

expressing positive feelings of peace in nature and freedom from the city. On the other hand, private photographs “highlighted isolation, loneliness and being in the middle of nowhere,” a description that differed greatly from the DMO’s idealized rendering of the place (Lo et al., 2011).

Digital technologies not only allow travelers to capture non-iconic, personal moments, but promote them as well. Social media gives these same travelers a platform on which to share these images with a huge network, thereby disseminating both iconic and less recognizable imagery. In her studies of travelers, Jennie Germann-Molz found that travel bloggers share not only the iconic images and stories of their trips, but the mundane moments as well. She writes that digital technologies allow bloggers to share, “images of the everyday, embodied experience of long-haul travel” that are shared with friends and family (2012, p. 147). Instead of being passive consumers of the marketing message, travelers “actively participate in reproducing—and often starring in—travel imagery” (Molz, 2012, p. 67). Though most tourist images do still tend to reinforce existing destination marketing images (Ruane, 2014), technological advancements have encouraged a growing diversification in the disseminated images of destinations and sights therein.

Mobile devices have further complicated the traditional consumption cycle, as users do not need to actually be traveling to participate in content production or dissemination. As mobile technologies keep tourists increasingly connected and in communication with others during their travels, the content consumers become “virtual tourists.” These virtual tourists are brought along for the trip as photos and experiences that once would have been shared and communicated with a small group of friends and family after the trip are now immediately uploaded and posted for a huge social network to view. The idea of “wish you were here!” has been changed to “Here’s where I am and [by sharing this photo] you are here with me!” Though they don’t produce content, “virtual tourists” have the same

ability to disseminate user content as corporeal travelers and thus widen the reach of embodied tourist experiences through social network sharing.

The fluidity of the temporal boundaries of today's travel also renders the hermeneutic circle archaic. Because the traditional consumption cycle relies on the dissemination of images via the mass media, it takes for granted a definite separation between "home" and "away," and assumes clear boundaries between planning for a trip prior to leaving, going on the journey, and then sharing upon return. But the addition of social media and connectedness into the fabric of traveling has contributed to a de-differentiation of "here" and "there." People can observe and experience the world through television and computer screens, and there is no definite beginning or end to these virtual travel experiences. This has resulted in a blurring of the boundaries between "travel" and "real life" and between "travel" and "home." As Lash and Urry declared, "people are tourists most of the time, whether they are literally mobile or only experience simulated mobility through the incredible fluidity of multiple signs and electronic images" (Haldrup and Larsen, 2009, p. 24). The tourist gaze is no longer completely separate from everyday life as Urry had argued previously (Larsen, 2014). With no systematic process for the order in which to experience places, the consumption cycle becomes fluid and is constantly in different stages of production based on the individual. From home or away, travelers actively contribute to reshaping the destination's imagery with their way of seeing and experiences places and attractions (Inversini et al., 2016). By sharing these types of images in their social networks, consumers have taken on the ability to co-produce destination image and the expectations of experiences.

4.4 – An improved consumption model

Therefore, I propose that the evolution of travelers as co-producers of their own experience necessitates the construction of a new consumption model of my own design. As I have demonstrated, the consumption cycle is no longer controlled by marketers and

then passively consumed and reproduced by travelers. Instead, travelers often co-produce images and experiences that differ greatly from DMO portrayals. Facilitated by the socio-technological shifts of mobility and social media sharing, travelers are encouraged to pursue, create, and share personalized experiences that appeal to their specific sensibilities. As other travelers view these photographs and read firsthand experiences, the pattern continues. In this way, the hermeneutic circle expands outwardly and diversifies upon each cycle, making it a branching and constantly developing spiral that allows each traveler to experience something uniquely personal and individualized. Marketers, then, are increasingly placed in a reactive position to travelers' whims where they adjust their tourism offerings to appeal to these individual desires. Destinations have responded to the heterogeneity of experiences shared by travelers on peer-to-peer sharing platforms by diversifying and expanding tourism offerings (Wang et al., 2016). I represent this relationship using an outwardly expanding spiral in Figure 2, below:

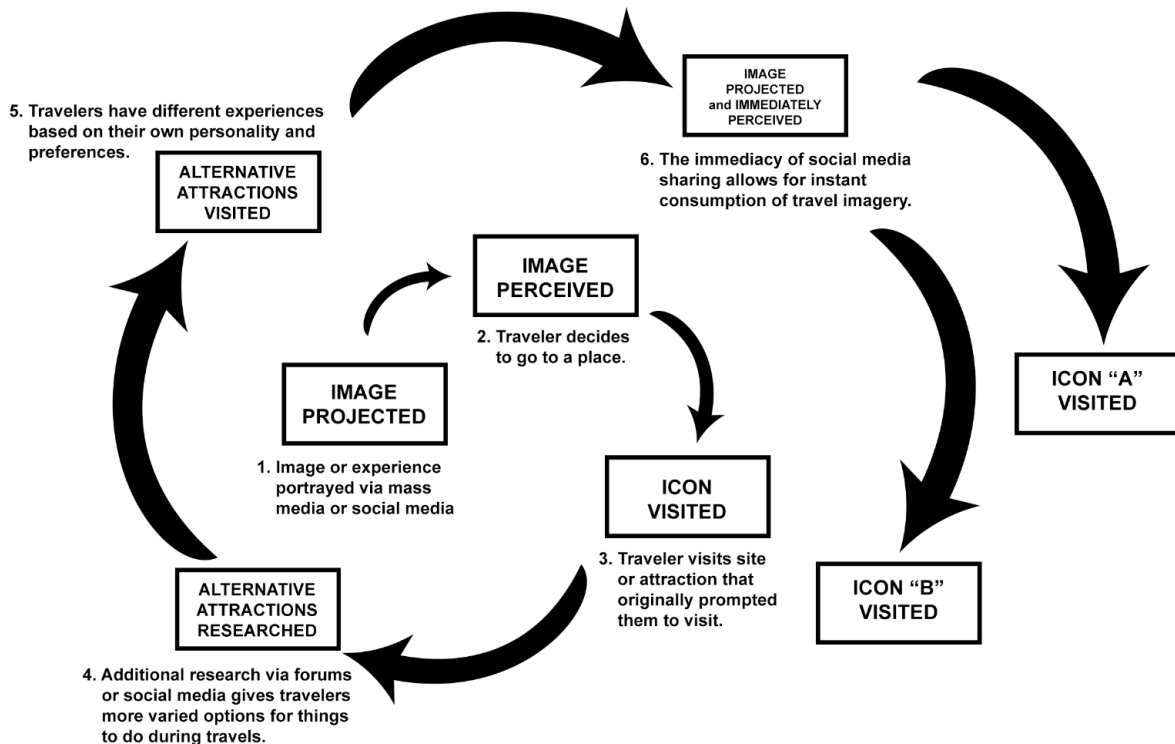


Figure 2: Expanded cycle based on influence of UGC and social media
Original model by author.

I constructed this model as the logical evolution of the consumption shift on which contemporary tourism theorists have just recently begun to comment. Though contemporary tourism theorists and researchers have observed and commented on the consumption shift, they so far have failed to recognize it as a fundamental change in tourism research, nor speculated on how it will continue to affect both tourism offerings and traveler expectations in the future (Larsen, 2014; Scarles, 2014; Urry and Larsen, 2011). Only this year did Wang, et. al. release a study showing the effects that the sharing economy has had on the diversification of tourism products (2016). As with many theories related to technology, the relationship is evolving faster than academic study can keep up. The pace of diversification and individualization will only increase as the cycle becomes further integrated into millennial travelers' experience, but the effects of the adjusted representation can be observed in the tourism market already.

The viability of my expanded consumption spiral can be observed in the evolution of accommodation sharing, the tourism market's response to travelers' demand for increasingly unique experiences and acceptance of both digital and real-life social networks. In the next chapter, I will demonstrate how the popular accommodation-sharing site Airbnb and their new "Live There" campaign appeal to the user-driven travel experience represented by the new model and promote the most recent evolution of personalization: to experience places "as the locals do."

CHAPTER FIVE: UTILIZING THE SPIRAL CONSUMPTION MODEL: ACCOMMODATION SHARING AND AIRBNB

New socio-technological advancements within the tourism market prove the usability of the expanded model of consumption depicted in the previous chapter. As argued, the evolution of travelers as co-producers of their own experiences has brought about a demand for individualized and social tourism products. In the expanded consumption model, tourism marketers do not strictly control the cycle, but instead react to consumer demands. In this chapter, I will exhibit the utility of the consumption spiral by examining the market's response to evolving traveler behaviors and expectations as demonstrated by the newest evolution in tourism products: accommodation sharing. As it has only come of age in the past half decade, academic research on this phenomenon is still in its infancy. Using the accommodation-sharing platform Airbnb and their new "Live There" campaign, I will argue that accommodation sharing is a physical amalgamation of millennial travelers' desire for personalized experiences, their familiarity in dealing with global social networks, and the mobile connectedness that is an intrinsic part of their lives.

5.1 – The rise of Airbnb

As the most successful accommodation sharing service to date, the rise of Airbnb demonstrates the successful adaptation of tourism products to suit traveler needs. Capitalizing on millennial travelers' widespread adoption of digital social networks, the company connects travelers with hosts all over the world. Only seven years old, the company now boasts more than sixty million guests ("Airbnb - Fact Sheet," 2016; PhoCusWright, 2014). From the outset, the company grew exponentially. Founded in 2008, it took until February 2011 for the company to book its first million nights, but only four months later a second million had been booked (Guttentag, 2015, p. 1198). Now, experts estimate that the site books more than 37 million nights *per year* (Baker, 2015). Listings have multiplied rapidly, as well. In 2010, there were 50,000 rooms on the site,

200,000 by mid-2012, and 300,000 by early 2013 (Guttentag, 2015, p. 1198). Today, there are more than two million, already overtaking some of the largest hotel companies (Baker, 2015).

The rapid growth of Airbnb demonstrates accommodation sharing's ability to appeal to the desires and characteristics of its consumer base. The company's success is outpacing most academic research of the phenomenon, but the handful of studies done on the individuals who are participating show that most accommodation-sharers belong to the millennial generation and are between 18-34 years old (PhoCusWright, 2014). Aside from cost benefits, these young travelers note "different locations," and "making connections" amongst the top advantages of the new accommodation model, which supports the theory that tourism products are evolving to suit the need for unique and social travel experiences (PhoCusWright, 2014).

5.2 – Accommodation sharing and the appeal to millennial desires

Most millennials want to get away from attractions and areas mobbed by crowds of tourists, and the ability to do so is a driving factor in the decision to choose an accommodation share over a traditional hotel. (PhoCusWright, 2014; Stors and Kagermeier, 2015). Accommodation sharing offers both more diverse and more "authentic" options. In fact, more than 80% of Airbnb's urban listings lie outside of traditional tourist accommodation zones (Robinson, 2016). As discussed in Chapter 4, tourists are willing to take advantage of offerings in different neighborhoods because of advancements in mobile devices and GPS location services that provide localized reviews and help to lessen the perceived risk of venturing outside of tourist zones. Like the "Neighborhoods" feature in the TripAdvisor app described in Chapter 3, this signifies an expansion of the traditional tourist territory and allows for tourists to further personalize their experience by choosing to stay in a neighborhood that appeals to their individual tastes. The listings themselves also allow for a degree of personalization. Unlike typical

hotels, Airbnb users have the option to book treehouses, castles, or condos. They can not only book entire homes for themselves, but also shared or private rooms within family homes, in which case the potential for social interaction with the host becomes as important as the accommodation itself.

The interpersonal aspect of accommodation sharing has roots in the shift in social behaviors encouraged by online knowledge sharing. These behaviors have been largely influenced by social media, which has provided the foundation for forging and sustaining relationships between travelers and a wide social network of both friends and strangers. Millennial travelers have become accustomed to the advice and feedback of individuals within these social networks, and therefore are already primed to accept these same social dynamics offline as well. As Haldrup and Larsen explain, “[s]ocializing at a distance has become significant everyday practice” (2009, p. 25). For Airbnb users, “personal contact is a key motivation for both hosts and guests—even if it is not usually very intense, generally concerning sharing inside knowledge about the city, and so on” (Stors and Kagermeier, 2015, p. 13). As discussed in Chapter 4, constant social connectedness and the increase in mobility is slowly de-differentiating the ideas of “tourist” and “local” to the point where the idea of experiencing things “like locals” is not outside the realm of possibility.

5.3 – Case in point: Airbnb and the “Live There” campaign

As if to prove this point, in April of 2016, Airbnb launched “Live There,” their biggest brand campaign to date. The campaign celebrates travelers’ rejection of mass tourism and commoditized travel, allowing travelers to “live in the heart of local neighborhoods, experience the hospitality and local expertise of hosts, and enjoy the comfort of every home” (“Airbnb ‘Live There’ Campaign,” 2016). Completely discarding the separation between “traveler” and “local,” the press release for the campaign proclaims that “[t]ravel is more than just seeing and doing. It’s the feeling of truly living somewhere” (“Airbnb ‘Live

There' Campaign," 2016). The branding is also reflected on the homepage, as seen in Figure 3, below:

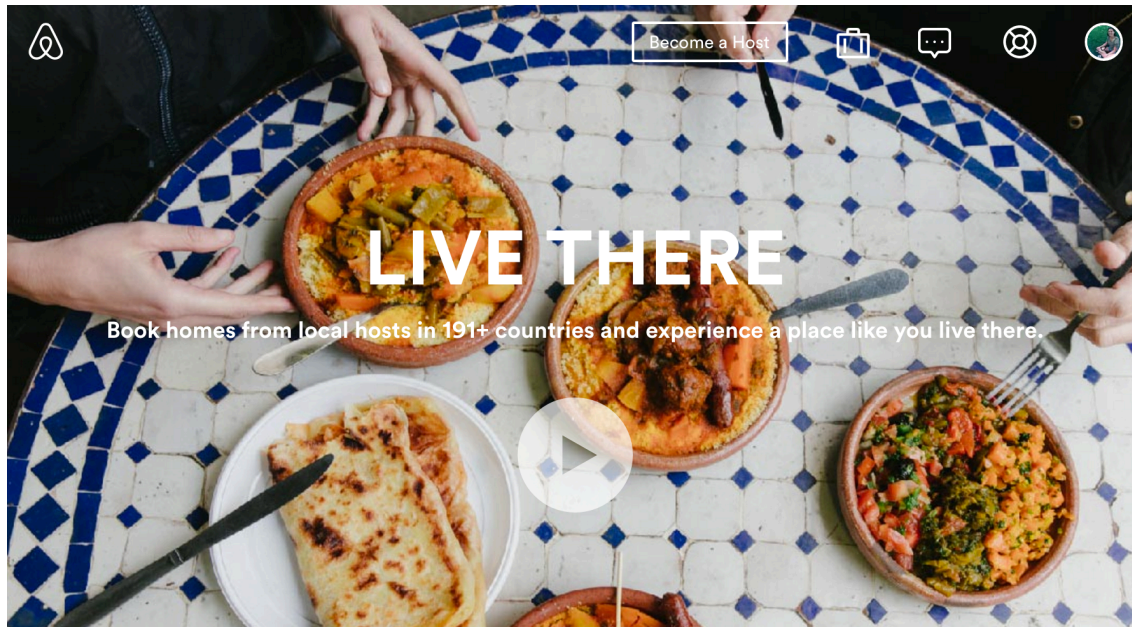


Figure 3: Airbnb homepage tout
Source: www.airbnb.com

The campaign was launched alongside an updated mobile app designed in response to the “growing dissatisfaction and disappointment with standardized tourist offerings that have become the hallmark of modern tourism” (“Airbnb ‘Live There’ Campaign,” 2016). The social aspects of the app will stay as they were: as with previous versions of the app, travelers are able to research accommodation, communicate with hosts, book listings, and leave reviews for hosts, but the app is designed to appeal to millennials’ desire for personalization with a reengineered search functionality based on user habits and preferences. The app responds to user input about desired experiences and properties, presenting listings in various locations based on what the trip necessitates. The development of an app that facilitates experiences based on unique user preferences demonstrates the individualization of the consumption cycle.

The app also includes a new Guidebooks feature that contributes to the diversification of the consumption spiral by exposing Airbnb users to off-the-beaten-track bars, restaurants, and attractions. As described in the press release, “[i]nstead of checking off a To Do list, Guidebooks help travelers find local gems not only in every city, but on every city block” (“Airbnb ‘Live There’ Campaign,” 2016). Capitalizing on the advancement in mobile technologies and the expansion of location-based opportunities, the new app relies on a combination of co-collaborated and user-generated content to provide travelers with numerous avenues for personalization and unique experiences.

The success of accommodation sharing amongst millennial travelers proves the viability of the new consumption model, and demonstrates that accommodation sharing is not a short-term trend. Supported by both technological advancements and a wider shift in traveler behaviors, the new phenomenon is an important stage in the evolutionary cycle of travel expectation and experience. Mobile technologies and GPS-based services co-evolved alongside the millennial desire for personalized and authentic journeys, and accommodation-sharing platforms are now appealing to these desires by offering diverse accommodations in areas outside of traditional tourist zones. In addition, the newest generations’ familiarity with online social relationships and co-collaboration means that accommodation sharing benefits from millennial travelers’ desire for social connections with their hosts.

CONCLUSION

In this paper, I have answered the question of how digital media technologies have affected the consumption of tourism experiences by arguing that the advancement of technologies has altered the traditional consumption cycle to such a degree that it is necessary to construct an entirely new model. Facilitated by technologies that celebrate individual perceptions and allow travelers to capture and share diverse, personalized experiences, the power dynamics of the conventional model have been drastically altered. Instead of acting as passive consumers, travelers have become content producers with the ability to instigate widespread change in the tourism market. Rather than forcing consumers to conform to the traditional mass tourism offerings, products must now correspond to the desires of the individual. This shift, I argue, is evident in the advent of accommodation sharing, which allows tourists an additional avenue for diverse and social experiences.

An investigation into the democratization of information, the rise of social media, the significance of eWOM, and the influence of mobile technologies brought me to this conclusion. After providing background on millennial travelers, Travel 2.0, and the complexities of the tourism study and the relationship between travel and technology in Chapter 1, I began exploring the foundations of user-generated content on the Web. In Chapter 2, I demonstrated the ways in which the development of Web 2.0 facilitated a fundamental shift from users as passive consumers to active producers of content. In examining this movement, I also discussed the growth of user empowerment and the rise of the “prosumer.” In Chapter 3, I argued that because of its intangibility, travel is uniquely positioned to benefit from electronic word-of-mouth, and that in fact, travelers now prefer to use user-generated content from forums, blogs, and reviews, during the planning process in lieu of marketing materials. I also examined the ways that travelers use specific social media platforms for research and sharing, and how mobile devices allow travelers the flexibility to both contribute to and benefit from such sources without having to wait

until they return home. I acknowledged the possible drawbacks of relying on information sources constructed by individuals with no economic stake in the product, but maintained that regardless of the shortcomings, interactive platforms have facilitated an unprecedented level of collective knowledge. Using TripAdvisor as an example, I demonstrated the ways in which travelers take advantage of existing technologies to co-create their own unique travel experiences.

In Chapter 4, I explained the history of the relationship between travel and photography and used classic tourism theory to show how mass distributed images are considered representations of experience and are used to construct imagined geographies. I introduced the traditional hermeneutic circle consumption model and then argued that it has become obsolete in light of the inclusion of digital cameras, social media, and mobile devices into modern travel. No longer do travelers passively consume and reproduce the imagery and products constructed by destination marketers. Instead, they are able to produce and disseminate their own representations and perceptions of destinations, which regularly deviate from the portrayals of destination marketers. Tourism managers are finding themselves in increasingly reactionary positions as travelers demand more uniquely personalized offerings.

I then proposed a new model for this relationship, represented by a spiral that expands and branches as tourism products become increasingly diverse and individualized in response to traveler desires. Finally, I demonstrated the validity of this model by examining the accommodation-sharing movement as an example of the markets' response to the clamor for increasingly unique offerings. Using the popular accommodation site Airbnb as an example, I argued that accommodation sharing's success is due to millennial travelers' belief that it deviates from the mass tourism offerings that were intrinsic to the hermeneutic consumption model. I also examined how Airbnb's new "Live There" campaign serves as an example of how increasing mobility has dissolved the boundary

between “tourist” and “local,” and is ushering in a new era of travel expectation based on this idea.

Thanks to the democratization of information facilitated by digital technologies and the social relationships that this evolution enabled, travelers’ rejection of mass tourism and desire for unique and personalized experiences are now driving a demand for increasingly diverse tourism offerings. In an era that celebrates the power of the individual, a “broad strokes” mass tourism approach is no longer applicable. The new consumption model not only means that destination marketers and managers must adjust their strategies to appeal to each equally-powerful traveler, but also that tourism research as a whole must fundamentally shift to account for the fact that individuals are now the driving force behind, as well as the target demographic of, the cycle.

REFERENCES

- About Us - Airbnb [WWW Document], 2016. URL <https://www.airbnb.ie/about/about-us> (accessed 5.6.16).
- Airbnb Launches New Products to Inspire People to “Live There” [WWW Document], 2016. . Airbnb. URL <https://www.airbnb.ie/press/news/airbnb-launches-new-products-to-inspire-people-to-live-there> (accessed 5.6.16).
- Amadeus, 2013. Trending with NextGen travelers: Understanding the NextGen consumer-traveler (No. MK-1420). Amadeus.
- Baker, M.B., 2015. Barclays: Airbnb Usage To Surpass Hotel Cos., But Not For Business Travel [WWW Document]. Business Travel News. URL <http://www.businesstravelnews.com/Hotel-News/Barclays--Airbnb-Usage-To-Surpass-Hotel-Cos-, -But-Not-For-Business-Travel> (accessed 5.6.16).
- BDRC Continental, 2014. BDRC Continental Holiday Trends 2014 Report.pdf.
- Blank, G., 2006. Critics, Ratings, and Society: The Sociology of Reviews. Rowman and Littlefield, Plymouth.
- Buhalis, D., Law, R., 2008. Progress in information technology and tourism management: 20 years on and 10 years after the Internet--the state of eTourism research. *Tourism Management* 29, 609–623.
- Christou, E., Nella, A., 2012. Web 2.0 and Networks in Wine Tourism: The Case Studies of greatwinecapitals.com and wineandhospitalitynetwork.com, in: *Social Media in Travel, Tourism, and Hospitality: Theory, Practice and Cases*.
- Edwards, D., Cheng, M., Wong, I.A., Zhang, J., Wu, Q., 2016. Ambassadors of Knowledge Sharing: Co-produced Travel Information Through Tourist-Local Social Media Exchange. *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*.
- Egger, R., Gula, I., Walcher, D., 2016. Towards a Holistic Framework of Open Tourism, in: *Open Tourism Open Innovation, Crowdsourcing and Co-Creation Challenging the Tourism Industry*.

- Facebook Newsroom | Company Info [WWW Document], 2016. URL <http://newsroom.fb.com/company-info/> (accessed 4.25.16).
- Fursich, E., 2002. Packaging culture: the potential and limitations of travel programs on global television. *Communication Quarterly* 50, 204–226.
- Gretzel, U., 2012. Introduction to Part 3, in: *Social Media in Travel, Tourism, and Hospitality: Theory, Practice and Cases*. Ashgate Publishing Limited.
- Gretzel, U., Yoo, K.H., 2008. Use and Impact of Online Travel Reviews. *Information and Communication Technologies in Tourism 2008* 35–46.
- Guttentag, D., 2015. Airbnb: disruptive innovation and the rise of an informal tourism accommodation sector. *Current Issues in Tourism* 18, 1192–1217.
- Haldrup, M., Larsen, J., 2009. *Tourism, Performance and the Everyday: Consuming the Orient*. Taylor & Francis.
- Inversini, A., Buhalis, D., 2009. Information Convergence in the Long Tail: The Case of Tourism Destination Information, in: Hopken, W., Gretzel, U., Law, R. (Eds.), *Information and Communication Technologies in Tourism 2009*. Springer, Switzerland, pp. 381–392.
- Inversini, A., De Carlo, M., Rega, I., 2016. Digital Tourist Gaze and Mega Events. Presented at the ENTER 2016, Bilbao, Spain.
- Kaplan, A., Haenlein, M., 2010. Users of the world, unite! The challenges and opportunities of Social Media. *Business Horizons* 53, 59–68.
- Kellner, D., Share, J., 2009. Critical Media Education and Radical Democracy, in: Apple, M.W., Au, W., Gandin, L.A. (Eds.), *Routledge International Handbook of Critical Education*. Taylor & Francis Routledge, New York, pp. 281–296.
- Larsen, J., 2014. The Tourist Gaze 1.0, 2.0, and 3.0, in: Lew, A.A., Hall, C., Williams (Eds.), *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Tourism*. Wiley Blackwell, West Sussex, pp. 304–314.
- Levinson, P., 2013. *New New Media*, 2nd ed, Always Learning. Pearson.
- Levinson, P., 1999. *Digital McLuhan: A Guide to the Information Millenium*. Routledge, London.

- Lo, I.S., McKercher, B., Lo, A., Cheung, C., Law, R., 2011. Tourism and online photography. *Tourism Management* 32, 725–731. doi:10.1016/j.tourman.2010.06.001
- MacCannell, D., 1999. *The Tourist: A New Theory of the Leisure Class*. University of California Press, Berkeley, California.
- Marine-Roig, E., Clave, S.A., 2016. Destination Image Gaps Between Official Tourism Websites and User-Generated Content, in: Inversini, A., Schegg, R. (Eds.), *Information and Communication Technologies in Tourism 2016*. Springer, Switzerland, pp. 253–265.
- Mavragani, E., Kladou, S., 2015. Assessing destination image: An online marketing approach and the case of TripAdvisor. *Journal of Destination Marketing & Management* 4, 187–193.
- Mazor-Tregerman, M., Mansfeld, Y., Elyada, O., 2015. Travel guidebooks and the construction of tourist identity. *Journal of Tourism and Cultural Change*.
- Milton, J., 1644. *Areopagitica; A speech of Mr. John Milton for the Liberty of Unlicenc'd Printing, to the Parliament of England*.
- Minazzi, R., Mauri, A., 2015. Mobile Technologies Effects on Travel Behaviours and Experiences: A Preliminary Analysis, in: *Information and Communication Technologies in Tourism, 2015*. pp. 507–521.
- Molz, J.G., 2012. *Travel Connections: Tourism, Technology, and togetherness in a Mobile World*. Routledge, USA.
- Neuhofer, B., 2016. Innovation Through Co-Creation: Towards an Understanding of Technology-Facilitated Co-creation Processes in Tourism, in: *Open Tourism Open Innovation, Crowdsourcing and Co-Creation Challenging the Tourism Industry*. Springer, New York, pp. 17–35.
- Parra-Lopez, E., Gutierrez-Tano, D., Diaz-Armas, R., Bulchand-Gidumal, J., 2012. Travellers 2.0: Motivation, Opportunity and Ability to Use Social Media, in: *Social Media in Travel, Tourism, and Hospitality: Theory, Practice and Cases*. Ashgate Publishing Limited, Surrey, England, pp. 171–189.
- PhoCusWright, 2014. *The U.S. Millennial Traveler: Leading a Travel Revolution*.

- Rainie, L., 2015. *The Changing Digital Landscape: Where Things are Heading*.
- Robinson, P., 2016. Keynote Speech: Patrick Robinson, Head of Public Policy, EMEA & Canada, Airbnb.
- Rowley, J., Kupiec-Teahan, B., Leeming, E., 2007. Customer community and co-creation: a case study. *Marketing Intelligence & Planning* 27, 136–146.
- Ruane, S.T., 2014. *Real Ireland- an Investigation into US Tourists' Holiday Photographs*. DIT, Dublin.
- Scarles, C., 2014. Tourism and the Visual, in: Lew, A., Hall, C., Williams (Eds.), *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Tourism*. Wiley Blackwell, West Sussex, pp. 325–336.
- Schwartz, J.M., 1996. The Geography Lesson: photographs and the construction of imaginative geographies. *Journal of Historical Geography* 22, 16–45.
doi:10.1006/jhge.1996.0003
- Stors, N., Kagermeier, A., 2015. Motives for Using Airbnb in Metropolitan Tourism—Why do People Sleep in the Bed of a Stranger? *Regions Magazine* 299, 17–19.
- Tapscott, D., Williams, A., 2006. *Wikinomics: How Mass Collaboration Changes Everything*. Penguin Group, New York.
- Tewksbury, D., Rittenberg, J., 2012. *News on the Internet: Information and Citizenship in the 21st Century*. Oxford University Press, Oxford.
- Toffler, A., 1980. *The Third Wave*. Bantam Books, USA.
- Tooke, N., Baker, M., 1996. Seeing is Believing: the Effect of Film on Visitor Numbers in Screened Locations. *Tourism Management* 17.
- TripAdvisor Fact Sheet [WWW Document], 2016. . TripAdvisor Fact Sheet. URL https://www.tripadvisor.com/PressCenter-c4-Fact_Sheet.html (accessed 4.16.16).
- TripAdvisor: Read Reviews, Compare Prices & Book [WWW Document], 2016. URL <https://www.tripadvisor.ie/> (accessed 4.25.16).
- Tuominen, P., 2011. *The Influence of TripAdvisor Consumer-Generated Travel Reviews on Hotel Performance*. University of Hertfordshire Business School.

- Ubud Forum - TripAdvisor [WWW Document], 2016. . TripAdvisor - Ubud. URL https://www.tripadvisor.ie/ShowTopic-g297701-i8984-k9464742-Hiring_motorbikes_with_surfboard Rack-Ubud_Bali.html (accessed 4.25.16).
- Urry, J., Larsen, J., 2011. *The Tourist Gaze 3.0*, 3.0 ed. Sage, Los Angeles.
- Volo, S., 2012. Blogs: "Re-inventing" Tourism Communication, in: *Social Media in Travel, Tourism, and Hospitality: Theory, Practice and Cases*. Ashgate Publishing Limited, Surrey, England.
- Wang, D., Fesenmaier, D., 2013. Transforming the Travel Experience: The Use of Smartphones for Travel, in: Cantoni, L., Xiang, Z. (Eds.), *Information and Communication Technologies in Tourism 2013*. Springer, Switzerland, pp. 58–69.
- Wang, D., Li, M., Guo, P., Xu, W., 2016. The Impact of Sharing Economy on the Diversification of Tourism Products: Implications for Tourist Experience, in: Inversini, A., Schegg, R. (Eds.), *Information and Communication Technologies in Tourism 2016*. Springer, Switzerland, pp. 683–694.
- Wang, D., Park, S., Fesenmaier, D.R., 2011. The Role of Smartphones in Mediating the Touristic Experience. *Journal of Travel Research* 0047287511426341. doi:10.1177/0047287511426341
- Wikipedia:Statistics, 2016. . Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia.
- Xiang, Z., Magnini, V., Fesenmaier, D., 2015a. Information technology and consumer behavior in travel and tourism: Insights from travel planning using the internet. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services* 22, 244–249.
- Xiang, Z., Wang, D., O’Leary, J.T., Fesenmaier, D., 2015b. Adapting to the Internet: Trends in Travelers’ Use of the Web for Trip Planning. *Journal of Travel Research* 54, 511–527.
- Yoo, K.H., Gretzel, U., 2012. Use and Creation of Social Media by Travellers, in: *Social Media in Travel, Tourism, and Hospitality: Theory, Practice and Cases*. Ashgate Publishing Limited, Surrey, England.

- Yoo, K.-H., Gretzel, U., 2011. Influence of personality on travel-related consumer-generated media creation. *Computers in Human Behavior, Web 2.0 in Travel and Tourism: Empowering and Changing the Role of Travelers* 27, 609–621.
- Yoo, K.-H., Sigala, M., Gretzel, U., 2016. Exploring TripAdvisor, in: *Open Tourism Open Innovation, Crowdsourcing and Co-Creation Challenging the Tourism Industry*. Springer, New York, pp. 239–256.