The Use of YouTube as a Tourism Marketing Tool

Dr. Sofia Reino
School of Arts, Social Sciences and Management
Queen Margaret University, UK

and

Professor Brian Hay
School of Arts, Social Sciences and Management
Queen Margaret University, UK

ABSTRACT

YouTube started as a social media tool, but is now evolving into a marketing communications tool. The aim of this paper is to investigate the use of YouTube as a tourism-marketing tool from the viewpoint of tourism organizations and tourists. Developing its theoretical base from the perspective on how tourists recognize images, a review of 320 European tourism videos on YouTube concluded that many organizations failed to understand that media produced for traditional marketing outlets (TV, cinema) cannot be transferred directly to YouTube. The study also highlighted the growing power of the individual consumer in tourism marketing, as reflected in the dominance of tourism videos produced by real tourists rather than by official tourism organizations. The study concluded that while YouTube was useful as a promotional/ communications tool, more research is required to understand how the YouTube generation filter, select and use tourism information in their trip planning.

Keywords: *DMOs, YouTube Videos, European Cities*

INTRODUCTION

The aim of this paper is to investigate the use of YouTube as a tourism-marketing tool from two perspectives: tourism organizations and the tourist. The marketing of tourism products is rapidly changing as the needs, wants and expectations of the tourist become more demanding. Through the use of internet, the power relationship between the individual tourist and the tourism sector is changing, to the benefit of the consumer. In order to maximize the chances of attracting new consumers, marketers are under pressure to engage with their potential consumers as early as possible in the decision-making process through the provision of much more pre-decision information about a destination or product. The traditional mass marketing techniques, such as brochures, TV adverts, consumer exhibitions and shows, are becoming less relevant to the new tourism consumer. As King (2002) states "it is the customer who can decide how and when they access their travel and tourism information". This is not to dismiss traditional marketing techniques, but as the tourism market becomes more crowded, as prices decrease and access to newer destinations and products becomes easier, there is a greater need to use all possible tools and methods to reach potential consumers.

One of these new methods is through the use of visual user generated content (UGC), through video sharing sites such as YouTube, which are increasingly playing an important role in both shaping a destination's/product image and in counteracting any negative perceptions, by connecting directly with the tourist. The recent use of videos of the Gulf of Mexico oil spill is a good example of how tourists businesses can show they are still open for business. Unlike traditional marketing methods, sites such as YouTube, Twitter, MySpace and Facebook facilitate a two-way flow of information, allowing the consumer to "speak" not only to the tourism business, but also to other consumers. It has to be recognized that traditional mainstream tourism organizations are no longer the only player selling a destination/product – the web offers the opportunity for every tourist to sell a destination/product by commenting on its offer. Sites such as YouTube, Trip Advisory and Expedia also give users a forum to share and rate their experiences, and so anyone who comments about a destination/product, are now part of the marketing process. As tourists are becoming more interested in real and authentic experiences in their leisure time, and as their time becomes more squeezed, they seek sources of information that will as far as possible heighten their experiences, and reduce their chances of a disappointing experience. Tourists are unpacking the different elements of the vacation experience provided by tourism organisations, and are now creating their own set of experiences.

YouTube is a site where users can upload, share and watch videos, and is the global leader in the video streaming market, with over a billion videos viewed every day. YouTube went public in December 2005 (YouTube, 2009) and in this short time, has experienced an astounding level of growth. Given the large audiences that they attract (98.1 million users in July 2009, YouTube, 2009), it is no surprise that marketers are now investigating the use of YouTube as a tourism-marketing tool. However, as Reinhard (2009) argues, their success has been limited, and that, "while individuals have used YouTube as a platform to step into the spotlight, most brands have been left behind or in the shadows", that is, the potential of YouTube has not been fully realized. Reinhard (2009) also observes that to achieve long-term success on YouTube, marketers have to "consistently and frequently publish refreshing content that has intrinsic value for audiences online". This failure to update and refresh their online images is one of the most frequent criticisms by consumers of online tourism information.

There is no doubt that technology is changing the way tourism destinations/products are presented to the consumer. Potential tourist can now watch a video of someone swimming in the Seychelles, climbing a volcano in Guatemala, sailing the Great Barrier Reef or walking in Yosemite National Park, without leaving their seat. The use of glossy brochures to sell us an image of a destination/product is rapidly coming to an end, as the static visual image of a destination/product, fixed in time (with a life span of 12-18 months), are no longer enough to excite potential tourists. Through sites such as YouTube, tourists can now get an immediate and a very real sense of where they want to go by viewing videos that other tourists have uploaded. To provide stimulating visual images, tourism organizations have to find ways of utilizing this demand to their advantage, as they are no longer the only game in town, when it comes to tourism marketing.

LITERATURE

This literature review will look at two strands: the development of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in tourism and destination image creation. The role of ICT in

shaping the structure of the tourism industry has been widely documented (Werthner & Klein, 1999; Buhalis, 2003), and primarily focussed on its use to support general marketing and distribution channels. However, the last few years have seen a significant change in the role of ICT in tourism, and this is now providing a leading role in supporting consumer empowerment in tourism marketing through User Generated Content (UGC).

Originally, UGC content would be mainly uploaded through websites specifically designed for C2C (consumer-to-consumer) communication, but nowadays, it is becoming more common in many B2C (business-to-consumer) sites. Studies have looked both at their influence in purchases and the motivators triggering online participation (O'Connor, 2008), and have examined Tripadvisor's hotel reviews and its potential influence, Yoo and Gretzel (2009). Among the potential benefits highlighted, was that such information was considered more trustful by consumers, than traditional advertising. Hofstaetter and Egger (2009) suggested that benefits are provided by both users and corporation blogs, and saw user's blogs as more authentic and independent, while corporate blogs were considered more structured.

Studies by Kang, et al. (2008), examined UGC, and focused on the opportunities that arose from a visual-based application, such as the uploading of photos. Schegg, et al. (2008) examined the level of adoption of Web 2.0 applications by some 3,000 hotels, but none of these businesses integrated any video blog applications into their website. Carrera, et al. (2008) undertook an exploratory study of mixing text and visual content and its opportunities for tourism marketing. While Murphy, Centeno, Gil and Schegg (2010) looked at videos, however, their work mainly examined motivations by tourists for sharing online content, rather than assessing marketing impacts.

In terms of destination image, there is empirical evidence, to suggest a strong link between destination image and tourists' buying behavior. Sirgy and Su (2000) found that, "consumer research has shown that a consumer's attitude towards a product (and product purchase) is influenced by matching a product's user image with the consumer's self concept". This can be tested and applied to a tourists' attitude towards a destination, as tourists have stereotypic images of different destinations. Tourism marketers can and do promote a specific destination images in order to maximize patronage, however, the question that remains to be answered, is what and whose image does a destination want to project?

Crompton (1979) argues that destination image is composed of a mixture of beliefs, ideas and impressions that a person holds about a certain destination, while Buhalis (2000) stated that destination image is made up of, "a set of expectations and perceptions a prospective traveler has of a destination". What is important about these two definitions is that the destination image refers to a tourist-based image, rather than one developed and projected by the destination.

However, the question remains as to how these perceptions are formed? Gartner (1993) argues that there are a wide varieties of factors that helps shape a destinations image. These can be from 1: induced sources such as traditional forms of advertising created by the destination/product, such as promotional videos 2: autonomous sources, which are independently, produced images, created by unofficial sources such as books, movies or social networks 3: organic sources such as word of mouth and experiences of other tourists. It is through these new

organic sources such as YouTube, that consumers are finding ways to connect with images that are outside the control of official images.

Shani, et al., (2010) argues that there is growing evidence to suggest that organic sources enjoy a high degree of reliability among potential tourists, because they are sourced from outside formal organizations. They argued that this type of information is more significant and powerful than the more traditional and formal sources of information, and that "the boundaries between the induced and autonomous factors seem to have blurred in recent years". For example, these strategies could include, building relationships with journalists and media networks and as Hudson and Ritchie (2006) and Busby and Klug (2001) suggest, the use of films and television also provide marketing opportunities. Movies such as Australia and Braveheart seek to project an image of a destination, as do TV shows such as Frasier and Sex in the City. Therefore, there is an increasing awareness amongst tourism marketers of the need to better integrate all the various forms of marketing communications into autonomous channels, which need to project a strong and consistent message, if they are to be successful.

The concept of a destinations' image is closely linked to Urry's (1990) seminal work on the "tourist gaze", where he argues that tourists are, "directed towards features of the landscape that separate them off from everyday experiences". Turner, et al, (2005) argues that this gaze is manipulated so that "the gaze falls upon what the gazer expects to see". Ibrahim and Gill (2005) linked this tourist gaze to a destinations image, arguing that before a tourist engages with a destination, they already have preconceived ideas of what they expect to see, which are based on a destination image, but how and where does the tourist source such images?

However, it is possible to argue that the concept of a fixed and static gaze does not really hold true, in this changing world of new technology and the increasing desire for more individual tourism experiences, rather than packaged experiences. Urry's gaze perhaps holds true in the more traditional and passive forms of tourism, but today's tourist are no longer outsiders looking in, but active participants, in every sense of the word. Franklin and Chang (2001) argue that tourists are, "seeking to be doing something in the places they visit rather than being endlessly spectatorially passive". New technology has given the tourist the power to plan their own itinerary and to go to places beyond the gaze. As MacCannell (1989) argues, "touristic consciousness is motivated by its desire for authentic experiences, and the tourist may believe that he is moving in this direction, but often it is very difficult to know for sure if the experience is in fact authentic". Drawing on the earlier work of Goffman (1959), MacCannell (1973) argues that tourism is like a performance, where there is a front stage and a back stage, and states that, "the front is the meeting place of hosts and guests or customers and service persons, and the back is where members of the home team retire between performances to relax and to prepare". It is the role of tourism marketing to determine the boundary between front and back stage. If the tourist wants authentic experiences, then they have to believe that this is being delivered, and if that means allowing them to peek at the back stage area, then tourism marketers have to find ways of allowing them to see this image, and this is where YouTube may have a role.

Fyall and Garrod (2005) argue that the tourist is now an active partner in the marketing process, and in order for destinations to succeed, they must "be able to provide them with the types of information and experience they are increasingly able to demand". King (2002) argues that marketers should look to establish ongoing, two-way communication channels with their

clients, and that greater emphasis should be placed on the creation and the promotion of vacation experiences, that link key brand values and assets with the desires of the customer.

Although this research examines the use of YouTube as a tourism-marketing tool, the literature has suggested some additional benefits arising from Web 2.0 applications, which mainly relate to the mix of perceived authenticity of the material uploaded by consumers. Additionally, this review of the tourism management literature has outlined a number of factors which assist in the generation of a destinations image, and include the use of both induced and organic sources, along with the need to develop both the expected tourism gaze and the more authentic/organic visual images tourists are now seeking.

METHODOLOGY

In order to explore the aims of the study and the issues raised in the literature review, the adopted methodology used a web analysis and selected case study approach with 32 European city destinations as the sample base. The study examined tourism videos placed on YouTube over the period 2006-10, irrespective of who placed these videos on YouTube. In order to control the selected sample and to be realistic in what was feasible, the sampling frame for this study was the list of European cities selected by Wöber (2007). His work undertaken between July 2003 and May 2006, and extracted travel-related keywords from the user log file of www.visiteuropeancities.info. Only those cities whose log file of this website recorded a high number of online searches (i.e. at least 300) were included in his final list of 32 cities, and with his permission, this list was used for this study. A further search of these cities was undertaken using YouTube in July 2010, and in order to be produce a manageable sample size, the first ten videos from the search of each of these 32 cities was analysed, giving in total a sample of 320 videos.

The first aim of this analysis was to assess if YouTube was actually used for marketing tourism, and evidence of this was provided by the number of tourism videos about the city. The classification of videos as either tourist or non-tourist videos, related to the content of their displays. Videos were classified as tourist videos if the content displayed images related to landscapes, landmarks, attractions and tourism facilities (e.g. transport or accommodation services) and/or provided travel advice. The subjective nature of this method of classifying the videos is acknowledged. The second aim of the analysis was to investigate the marketing strategies, used following the elements, which were derived from the literature of tourism destination image, namely: authenticity/tourism gaze; structured; organic/induced.

The research limitations of this study include: the randomization of the sample, the rigor in which Wober selected his sample, the degree to which the selected videos represents the full range of material about the destination and the images projected, the assumption that popularity (top ten) is a reflection of the usefulness of the videos. However, the greatest limitation of the study is the assumption of the neutrality of the search engine, which generated the listings. Although we had no control over this procedure, in order to test the consistency of the listings, the search of each of the 32 cities was repeated several times, and no variations in these listings were recorded. We have also assumed that users of YouTube looking of tourism information will tend to focus on the top ten listings, and not search beyond these; this may or may not be true.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1 presents a summary of the results, including the number of tourism-related videos produced by the search. This search included images showing landmarks, panoramic views, tourism facilities (e.g. transport or accommodation services) and/or travel advice. The non-tourist videos found through the analysis related to broadcasted soccer matches, printing machines whose name aligned with that one of the city (e.g. Heidelberg), broadcasted concerts (e.g. U2's concert in Dublin) or non-tourism facilities (e.g. Aachen University).

Table 1: Tourism-Related Videos Produced from Searches in YouTube

	Public Organisations	Private Organisations	Individual	Unknown	Total
Aachen			3		3
Amsterdam		1	3	1	5
Barcelona					0
Berlin					0
Bergen			2		2
Bern			4	2	6
Brussels		1	2		3
Budapest	1	2	1		4
Copenhagen		1	1	1	3
Dublin	1	1	2		4
Glasgow		1	1		2
Gothenburg		1	3		4
Heidelberg	1		3		4
Helsinki		1	2	1	4
Lisbon		1	2		3
London		1	1		2
Liverpool					0
Luxembourg			6		6
Lyons					0
Madrid		1			1
Maribor			2		2
Nice		1			1
Nantes					0
Paris		1	4		5
Prague		6	3		9
Rotterdam			1		1
Stockholm	1	2	2		5
Tallinn	3		2		5
Torino					0
Vienna			1		1
Zagreb			5		5
Zurich	1	1	1		3
Total	8 (8.6%)	23 (24.7%)	57 (61.3%)	5 (5.4%)	93 (100%)

The results suggested that only 93 of the 320 (30%) videos contained tourism-related information. However, the results did vary by cities, for example, Prague produced the highest number of tourism-related videos (n=9/10), while none of the first ten videos for Barcelona, Berlin, Liverpool, Lyons, Nantes and Torino were tourism-related. The average number of

tourism-related videos produced by each city was 2.9, and suggests that for users of YouTube, tourism-related content while limited, does exist.

_____ Table 1 also provides information of the type of users generating tourism-related videos for each of the 32 cities. The results show that there were significant differences across cities, with Luxembourg accounting for the largest number of videos generated by individuals (n=6/10), while Prague (n=6/10) generated the highest number by private businesses, and Tallinn generated the highest number of videos produced by public organisations (n=3/10). Regardless of these differences, the results show that the largest number of tourism-related videos were amateur videos (61%), i.e. videos made by individual users, while a third (33%) were professionally-produced, by either public or private organisations. This suggests the dominance of amateur videos as sources of tourism information, and the somewhat limited role played by formal organisations in producing tourism content for YouTube.

_____ Additional analysis suggested that 1 in 4 (25%) of all tourism promotional videos in the YouTube sample are provided by private organisations, but this is considerably higher than public sector organisations 1 in 10 (9%), and mainly relates to material produced by public DMOs. This suggests that the adoption of YouTube for tourism promotion is limited, and this applies especially to DMOs. As at July 2010, there were only six cities from the sample of 32 whose DMOs produced promotional material available on YouTube: Budapest, Dublin, Heidelberg, Stockholm, Tallinn and Zurich.

_____ Videos produced by private businesses were few in number, and include: airlines (n=2), travel guides (n=11), accommodation (n=3), TV programmes (n=5), conference centre (n=1), train company (n=1). An example of these videos is that one by hostelworld about Dublin (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bLACdPtyX-s). Interestingly, videos generated by the accommodation sector were all produced by this hostel company (hostelworld), and this may be a reflection that hostel users (primarily young and individual travellers) have been identified as predominant users of YouTube. The lack of videos from major private sector tourism organisations in the sample, suggests that major providers from the accommodation, attraction and transport sectors may have not yet penetrated this marketing channel. It was also noted that even the major tourism organizations videos were not uploaded by them, but by individual users. This suggests that organizations have limited control on the placement content of their videos, relying instead on individuals who may or may not work with the company; and so may be in danger of losing control of their marketing.

_____ It was noticeable that only a few of these videos had been uploaded through what YouTube calls "brand channels". This is a marketing tool within YouTube that allows users to develop a branded website, which could include videos and they may or may not allow other users to upload material. It therefore combines the capability of user-generated content, with an ability to organize its content, and so develop additional marketing opportunities.

_____ In terms of the year of upload of the videos, about 2 in 5 (39%) were over 3 years old (uploaded in 2006/07), which makes them outdated for use in digital media/marketing. Further analysis of the data suggests that only two of these videos had been uploaded in 2010 (Bern, Budapest). Additionally, the percentage of these videos, which were uploaded during the previous year (2009), was limited (17%), this suggests that the tourism-related content in

YouTube is relatively obsolete. From this analysis, one popular new trend in YouTube has been the production of spoof DMOs adverts. Such spoofs have the ability at very low cost, to undermine the carefully crafted and usually expensively produced messages from official DMOs, although it could also be argued that they are part of the democratization of information sources.

CONCLUSION

Tourist are not looking to be passively entertained, they want to control and to determine what happens on their vacation, and YouTube offers them the opportunity to search for very specific activities, watch reviews, and to seek help and advice about their destination. It is the democracy of sites such as YouTube that is liberating for the tourist. They can now decide what they want to do, based on the experiences of other like-minded tourists, as tourists do not want to be sold a destination/product, rather they want to be active in creating their own experiences, based on the experiences of likeminded others.

This study argues that the different stakeholders involved in tourism are still struggling to understand the potential of YouTube. However, it would seem that YouTube and other Web 2.0 sites are leveling the playing field for the tourist, by providing access to information that would otherwise be difficult to obtain. While, tourism organizations are still trying to understand how they can apply traditional campaigns to these new channels, what they fail to understand is that the market place has changed, placing existing TV and cinema content on YouTube, is just not good enough. As tourists make more use of sites such as YouTube, they are increasingly cynical about any attempt to pass of something created or fake, as something 'real'. This cynicism and scepticism has forced tourism organizations to think of new ways to sell their products, without arousing the suspicions of their consumers. Perhaps the best way would be to invite popular YouTube providers to produce YouTube videos for tourism organizations, rather than relying on official advertising agencies, who just do not have the 'street creed' to understand YouTube. Official advertising agencies try hard to make their messages appear as they were generated from autonomous or organic sources, as these are the ones that are most trusted and have the most influence with tourists who use YouTube, but very few tourism organizations have been successful at creating YouTube content, that is relevant to YouTube users.

In terms of further research there are a number of areas that warrant investigation A still unanswered question, is why tourists want to place their videos on YouTube, is it because they want to share their experiences with their friends and the wider world for reasons of philanthropy, or are we all becoming voyeurists? Another fruitful area of investigation, could be the post vacation experience – as the length of trips decrease, does YouTube act as an extension of the vacation? The impact of spoof DMOs/hotels/attractions videos also have not been fully assessed, it could be argued either that they impact negatively on official videos, or are they actually helpful.

Significance to industry

Perhaps the best example of how it has been utilized recently was for Ireland's GO campaign, organized by Tourism Ireland. This campaign was composed of a series of short films featuring real people from around Ireland, where they introduced the viewer to their local area and took them on a tour based on their knowledge of the best locations in Ireland, that were not necessarily in the guidebooks. This campaign was successful because it blended the three sources

of destination image as discussed early by Gartner (1993): it tapped into the tourist's desire for authentic experiences; it used locals to host these videos, and gave the tourists a glimpse of the backstage. VisitScotland also adopted a similar approach in their 2010 campaign 'Meet the Scots'.

From this research, it is clear that most DMOs are trying to force existing induced images and sources to fit into autonomous channels, such as YouTube. They seemingly have not understood that success using new media rests on being able to strike a balance between all three sources (induced, organic, autonomous). What has happened is that many organizations have simply uploaded traditional promotional adverts onto YouTube, and it is obvious to YouTube viewers, that this content was not created with YouTube generation in mind.

YouTube is also a useful marketing tool for the accommodation sector since it allows them to create promotional videos, which could then be viewed by people either searching for them on YouTube. Recently the use of streaming videos by hotels has been added to many corporate websites (Hilton, Marriott, etc). The main advantage of imbedding videos and uploading them in YouTube from a marketing perspective is that it adds richness to a website, and can bring hotels to the notice of potential customers. However, YouTube can also act as the eyes and ears of consumers, and has the ability to distinguish between the front stage (official images) and backstage (unofficial images), as consumer can upload images on YouTube, and this can change the power relationship between the consumer and the provider of a service. One of the hidden dangers of YouTube from a company perspective is that disgruntled employees can also upload unhelpful backstage images, and this may impact negatively on any carefully created marketing campaign, just as much as a consumer video.

There is a strong case that tourism organizations have to start to consider using YouTube within their marketing mix. However, a key message that equally applies to other social media tools is that tourism organizations have to start understanding that tourists do not want to feel they are being sold something. The trick for tourism organizations to make tourists believe that what they are seeing is real. This is one of the reasons why the GO campaign in Ireland and Meet the Scots campaign in Scotland was successful; they used real people, who were passionate about their surroundings. It is this trick that tourism organizations must learn to master in the future if they are to be successful in using new marketing channels such as YouTube. However, today's tourist is increasingly sceptical about real and staged authenticity, and in order for a campaign to seem real, it has to blend all three of Gartner's sources, paying more attention than in the past to autonomous and organic sources. This is a difficult balance to strike, which could explain why so few tourism organizations use YouTube.

It remains to be seen how much of a role YouTube will play in the future of tourism marketing, but for tourists, hotels and visitor attractions, the opportunities are there to be explored. All indications suggest that YouTube will keep growing in popularity, and will continue to be a valuable resource for the independently minded tourist to plan their trips. It will also give them a forum to pass on tips and recommendations for other tourists who might be looking for similar experiences. YouTube provides the tourist with organic sources of information and it allows them not only to gaze at what they are seeing, but also to participate in the creation of a destination image and to share this image. YouTube also provides the tourist with an increased knowledge base, upon which they can make better-informed decisions; tourists

no longer need to be virgin decisions makers, and can use the collective wisdom of YouTube to help them in their vacation decision making.

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