

**YOUNG MEDIA-INDUCED TRAVELERS: ONLINE REPRESENTATIONS OF
MEDIA-INDUCED TRAVEL CONVERSATIONS**

A Thesis

by

MICHELLE RENEE SCARPINO

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies of
Texas A&M University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF SCIENCE

August 2008

Major Subject: Recreation, Park & Tourism Sciences

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ABSTRACT

Young Media-Induced Travelers: Online Representations of Media-Induced Travel
Conversations. (August 2008)

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In recent years, destination marketers have experienced increasing pressure to compete in niche marketing, where critical analysis of each unique target market's consumer needs is essential for marketing success. Destination marketers spend considerable time and financial resources identifying, characterizing and accommodating consumer needs in niche markets. Meanwhile, consumers are utilizing all aspects of information technology to plan, book, and better inform their travels. Youths' growing participation and influence in the travel and tourism industry has received moderate attention both conceptually and empirically. Furthermore, despite the increasing availability of travel information online, youths' predisposition toward media usage and their growing propensity toward travel and tourism, there has been relatively little to no attention paid towards young travelers' use of the Internet as a multifaceted travel information source.

This thesis focused on broadening our knowledge of young travelers online travel information search behavior within the context of media-induced tourism. Taking a netnographic approach, this study explored how electronic word-of-mouth regarding

travel destinations, products and services is mediated through Internet technology, specifically how online communities and online discussion forums are utilized as important venues, which support conversations among travelers (Wang, Yu & Fesenmaier, 2002; Wang & Fesenmaier, 2004). Study results supported previous arguments that online communities and social networking play an important role in mediating travel information search and decision-making, especially for youth, fan culture and media-induced tourism. The overall findings, limitations to this study, suggestions for future research, and practical and theoretical implications are discussed.

DEDICATION

To the four strongest and most beautifully dynamic women I have ever had the pleasure of sharing my life. These women carry me when I am weak, encourage me when I am low, and rejoice with me when I persevere. As I walk through the Lord's Kingdom, I pray that my soul holds a little piece of each one of them, *Mae, Janice, Patrice and Rosslyn.*

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Finally, I would like to acknowledge that I am but a servant, and that I am grateful that all things are possible through the Lord, my God and his son Jesus Christ.

NOMENCLATURE

CMC	Computer-Mediated-Communication
CGM	Consumer Generated Media
DVD	Digital Video Disk
eWOM	electronic Word-of-Mouth
HTML	Hyper Text Markup Language
IT	Internet Technology
ODF	Online Discussion Forum
OTH	One Tree Hill
SYTA	Student Youth Travel Association
TIA	Travel Industry Association of America
TV	Television
UNWTO	World Tourism Organization
U.S.	United States
U2U	User to User
WOM	Word of Mouth

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Mass media have long lured travelers to specific destinations such as *Harry Potter*'s famous Platform 9-3/4 at Kings Cross Station, the picturesque hillsides of New Zealand in J.R.R. Tolkien's movie trilogy *Lord of the Rings*, or as of late, the secluded and mysterious island of Oahu in the hit television series *Lost*. Media-Induced Tourism has become more and more popular among not only movie audiences, but also television fans seeking adventure and the opportunity to experience and at times become part of their favorite television shows.

While the study of media-induced tourism has yet to establish itself in tourism research, the tourism industry is becoming increasingly aware of the economic benefits of media-induced tourism. New York-based company *On-Location Tours, Inc* (2007) offers tourists exclusive tour packages for famous television shows such as *Sex and the City*, *The Sopranos* and TV/movie tour packages that drop tourists at their favorite scene locales for shows like *Will and Grace*, *Friends*, *The Cosby Show* and more recently *Rescue Me* and *The Apprentice*. The Korea Tourism Organization publishes the Hallyu Tourism Guidebook specifically to attract foreign tourists to Korea by providing a variety of information on the latest movies and television series and their filming locations. Recent research by Hudson & Ritchie (2006a) reviewed the importance of

This thesis follows the style of *Journal of Travel Research*.

marketing activities by Destination Marketing Organizations (DMOs) in their attempt to attract film tourists. Hudson & Ritchie suggest that “in an increasingly competitive and crowded marketplace, destination placement in films and TV shows is an attractive marketing vehicle that increases awareness, enhances destination image, and results in significant increases in tourism numbers, succeeding where traditional marketing efforts cannot” (2006, p. 395). Marketing opportunities for television series have been differentiated from movies/films by their tendency to generate interest in destination-specific travel over an extended period of time. Film production for movies usually only last several weeks to several months. Therefore, television shows that utilize filming outside the studio and run for several years are able to build a fan base with a prolonged investment in the show.

In the past, media consumption and travel and tourism researchers have suggested numerous conceptualizations of mass media’s ability to induce destination-specific travel. For instance, Beeton (2005) posits ‘film-induced tourism’ as the ‘on-location tourism that follows the success of a movie (or set), television program, video or DVD in a particular region’ (p. 4). Several other researchers have argued for more specific definitions, such as ‘movie-induced’ tourism, people seeking sights/sites seen on the silver screen (Im, Chon, Peters, & Weiernair, 1999; R. Riley, Baker, & Van Doren, 1998; R. Riley & Van Doren, 1992; R. W. Riley, 1994) and ‘television-induced’ tourism (Butler, 1990; Evans, 1997). Nielson’s (2001) conceptualization of media-induced tourism refers to mass media’s ability to influence travelers trip planning and decision-making process through more than film, television, and traditional literary formats (e.g.

books, journals etc.), but including radio, government reports and other communication platforms.

While each definition provides an additional layer to the growing global phenomenon of media-induced travel, the current study focuses on television programs' ability, in tandem with online fan culture or 'cyber-fandom' (Costello, 1999), to influence and induce destination-specific travel. Specifically, this thesis investigates how modern communications platforms including online discussion forums in fan-based online communities facilitate travel information search among the younger generation of media-induced travelers. Therefore, a broader notion of media-induced tourism is adopted (Nielsen, 2001).

In recent years, a crafty and well-built partnership between television (TV) programming and Internet Technology (IT) has become more influential in inducing destination-specific tourism among the young viewing audience. For example, 'reality' TV programs such as MTV's *The Real World*, the show's official Website at www.realworld.mtv.com, and the thousands of fan sites available 24 hours a day, give rise to a new fan culture increasingly involved in the TV show and its related Web content. Furthermore, the amount and availability of generation-specific TV programming and its corresponding Internet content has risen substantially (Neilson, 2007), tempting fans as potential media-induced travelers with the prospect of celebrity watching, becoming an extra, or at times simply standing on the very street corner they see day after day in their favorite TV show.

Interestingly, previous literature in media-induced tourism appears to focus primarily on adult travelers (Beeton, 2005; R. Riley et al., 1998; Tooke & Baker, 1996), likely due to assumptions about youths' poor financial situation, a lack of understanding towards youths' travel decision-making process (Pritchard & Morgan, 1996) or simply an unawareness of youths' participation in media-induced tourism.. In the same light, an increasing amount of academic studies have been examined leisure travel behavior, online fan culture, and youths' media usage respectively, but have yet to explore young travelers as fans who use of the Internet and electronic Word-of Mouth (eWOM) to facilitate their media-induced travel information search and decision-making process.

A major distinction between the current cohort of young travelers and their predecessors is the role of technology (Vaughn, 2007). From ceaseless text messaging to daily online social networking, today's younger generation rely heavily on communication technology and media usage (Ramasubramanian & Martin, 2008). A recent study by the Pew Internet and American Life Project (2006) revealed that over 88% American Internet users are between the ages of 12 and 29, and that 77% of teens use the Internet to get news or search for information. Despite these findings, studies regarding youths' online information search behavior have been somewhat limited, while research involving youths' online information search behavior in the context of travel and tourism are practically non-existent. Nonetheless, research indicates that 'youth' are a significant traveling population (Student Youth Travel Association, 2007), predisposed to media formats (Macgill, 2007) and increasingly engaged in the creation and use of consumer-generated media (CGM), such as online discussion forums (ODFs),

which support and eWOM as part of their information-seeking behavior (eMarketer, 2008b; Lenhart, Arafeh, Smith, & Macgill, 2008).

Therefore, in exploring and identifying the unique characteristics of a younger media-induced traveling population, we are able to provide industry professionals the knowledge necessary to create innovative marketing and advertising strategies that will more effectively attract and address the needs of both young media-induced travelers and the youth tourism market as whole. Additionally, efforts made toward identifying the information search behavior of today's young travelers will provide substantial benefit toward capturing the then adult traveling market of tomorrow.

The CW Network's hit television series, *One Tree Hill* (OTH) and its fan base was selected as the television media context for this study. According to Nielsen TV Ratings (2007), OTH scored very high among teens and female viewers ages 12-34. Premiering in 2003, OTH can be categorized as your classic teenage angst drama series, with the typical popularity contests, love triangles, substance and heavy alcohol use, dysfunctional relationships with parents, friends and of course the educational system.

The show revolves around five main characters, two male half-brothers, Lucas (Chad Michael Murray, *Dawson's Creek*, *A Cinderella Story*) and Nathan (James Lafferty, *A Season on the Brink*) as well as three females, Peyton (Hilarie Burton), Haley (Bethany Joy Lenz) and Brooke (Sophia Bush), all of whom have been significant others to one of the two lead male characters at some time or another. The show an instant success captured the hearts of countless starry-eyed teenagers and young adults across the globe. OTH is set in the quaint fictional town of 'One Tree Hill, North Carolina',

also known in real life as the city of Wilmington, North Carolina. The majority of the filming for the show takes place at various locations around Wilmington, while the remainder of the filming takes place at EUE Screen Gems Studios, which is also based out of Wilmington.

One Tree Hill proves to be an interesting case of media-induced tourism for three reasons: 1) it has spurred travel to Wilmington, North Carolina (Hotz, 2008), which has an established tourism industry; 2) it involves filming at a studio as well as at various locations at the destination; and 3) its audience consists of teenagers and young adults (Lachonis, 2007), a group which is highly engaged in online conversations and is under-researched in tourism as far as its travel behavior is concerned.

The main objective of this thesis, therefore, was to identify if and how fans utilize online fan-based communities to facilitate their media-induced travel information search and decision-making process. Specifically, this study sought to explore how *One Tree Hill* fans, as members of an online fan-based community, mediate their travel information search and decision-making through online travel conversations within this community. In taking a 'netnographic' or online ethnographic approach, this study uses a fan-based online discussion forum to investigate a) how members of this online community engage in travel related conversations; b) specifically what topics are discussed; c) how this community can be conceptualized as an information source; and d) what these travel conversations reveal about the individuals as both fans and community members' regarding their travel decision-making behavior. The following five Chapters of this thesis are presented as follows: Chapter II: Literature Review,

provides a brief overview of eWOM, media-induced tourism, fan culture, online- and online travel information search, as well as an introduction to the young traveler;

Chapter III: Methodology, presents a description of the methods used, including data collection, analysis and positionality under which this study was conducted; Chapter IV: introduces the results of this study as they emerged from a qualitative analysis of the data; lastly, Chapter V: Discussion & Conclusions, provides a short summary of the research, engages in discussion and conclusion of the findings, and offers theoretical and practical implications as well as suggestions for future research.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Scholars and practitioners in tourism are becoming increasingly aware of the power and influence that can be attributed to word-of-mouth (WOM) and specifically electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) due to its “digital, large-scale, anonymous, and ephemeral nature” (Litvin, Goldsmith, & Pan, 2008), not to mention its extraordinary popularity and influence on diverse and vast populations of travelers. Research indicates that consumers rely heavily on the Internet as a resource for information they pass along to family and friends (Keller Fay, 2006), and that eWOM has the potential to greatly impact consumers’ decision-making processes (Bickart & Schindler, 2001; Gretzel & Yoo, 2008). Where as traditional WOM behavior is based on face-to-face interaction, close proximity and social cues (Knapp & Daily, 2002), computer-mediated communication (CMC) does not provide such contextual information. However, research suggests that, given ample time, individuals can create fully formed impressions of others based solely on the linguistic content of electronic messages (Brown, Broderick & Lee, 2007). Thus, eWOM has a real potential to substitute for traditional WOM.

With Internet technology evolving at a rapid pace, industry professionals are forced to more closely examine how specific groups of consumers (e.g. youth) engage in interpersonal communication through online communication platforms (i.e. eWOM) (Litvin et al., 2008). Thus, exploring online communication applications that further empower providers and consumers through a reciprocal exchange of information and

opinions, such as blogs, discussion forums, email, podcasts etc., may provide extremely useful insight toward travel consumers' decision-making process and in return increase efficiency and effectiveness of travel and tourism marketing strategies.

Media-Induced Tourism

According to Elliot, Hoyle, & Hines of the UK-based *The Times* magazine (2006), media-induced tourism has in recent years grown into a global phenomenon in the travel and tourism industry. Early conceptualizations of media-induced tourism have included Urry's (1990, p. 3) suggestion that travel decision-making has past been driven by 'fantasy-derived anticipation' directly related to film, television, and literature. Riley, Van Doren, Tooke and Baker introduced the concept of "movie-induced tourism" (see (R. W. Riley, 1994), (R. Riley & Van Doren, 1992) (R. Riley et al., 1998; Tooke & Baker, 1996). Movie-induced tourism is defined as tourism induced from a desire to visit the on-location (or set) of a movie in a particular region. More recent research supports and extends the concept of movie-induced tourism through the notion of 'film-induced tourism' (Beeton, 2001, 2003, 2004, 2005, 2006a, 2006b, 2006c; Beeton & Benfield, 2002; Beeton & Pinge, 2003). Attention has been paid to a wide range of aspects in film-induced tourism from production studios to theme parks, on- and off-site filming, destination marketing and social construction, and film tourists' motivations, simultaneously suggesting that people visit film sites to view the scenery, enjoy an activity, relive an experience encountered in the film, or to obtain an element of celebrity status through association (Beeton, 2005). Additionally, this rapidly growing

phenomenon has been studied to some extent in terms of its impact on destinations, its role in destination marketing, and its potential as a strategic tourism-planning tool (Beeton, 2001, 2006a; Busby & Klug, 2001; Croy & Walker, 2001; R. Riley et al., 1998; R. Riley & Van Doren, 1992; Tooke & Baker, 1996).

In particular, destination marketing literature reveals that media-induced tourism has been considered a tool utilized for strategic regional planning in terms of infrastructure development, increased jobs and amenities, and tourism development (Croy & Walker, 2001).

While, film-induced tourism focuses on movies, television, videos and DVDs (Beeton, 2006c), media-induced tourism encompasses a much wider array of *mass* media formats including literature and radio (Nielsen, 2001). Macionis (2004) posits *media tourism* as a ‘post modern experience of a place that has been depicted in some form of media representation. That is, an experience that is highly personalized and unique to each individual based on their own interpretation and consumption of media images’ (2004, p. 87). More recent perceptions of media-induced tourism have included Reeves’ (2003, p. 4) assertion that media tourism is often the direct outcome of potential travelers ‘irresistible drive to intimately view for themselves those destinations to which they have some form of emotional connection because of their film manifestation. Conversely, Connell (2005, p. 228) broadly states that “films and television dramas are widely recognized as a stimulus that can induce people to visit destinations.” While several definitions of media-induced tourism have been posited, this thesis adopts Nielsen’s (2001) concept that media-induced tourism emphasizes the relationship

between mass media formats such as television, literature and film, and the behavioral patterns that influence potential travelers' decision-making process.

The existing literature also provides some evidence regarding the diverse motives of media-induced tourists (Iwashita, 2003; Macionis, 2004). Lee (2007) recently introduced celebrity fandom as an important motivator that influences destination image and induces travel to specific locations associated with a celebrity. What is missing is a better understanding of the specific role played by fan culture in media-induced tourism.

Fan Culture

Society has observed the escalation of 'fan culture' for decades. During the Roman Empire, Gladiators performed in fan-packed Coliseums. In the early 1920's and 30's society witnessed the formation of Science fiction fan clubs and science fiction fanzines (amateur fan magazines) (H. Jenkins, 2006). Today fan culture has become an even more pervasive phenomenon as indicated by the nearly 2.5 million *American Idol* fan sites identified by Google.com or the over three million fan sites dedicated to one of TV's hottest shows, *Grey's Anatomy*. Since the introduction and expansion of television programming, TV networks created numerous opportunities for audiences to transition from a casual viewer into a more involved 'fan.' The term 'fan' originated from the word 'fanatic' or 'fanaticism' which has been defined as 'the level of involvement or interest one has in the liking of a particular person, group, trend, artwork or idea' (Rudin, 1969; Thorne & Bruner, 2006).

Literature on fandom has largely focused on fan involvement as part of an obsessive or compulsive behavior, under which only a subset of fans (also identified as a dysfunctional fan) usually fall. A number of scholars, however, have identified fanaticism as a ‘normal, everyday cultural or social phenomenon’ (Hunt, Bristol, & Bashaw, 1999; Lewis, 1992); while others tend to direct their attention toward certain genres of fandom (Aiken & Campbell, 2005; Kozinets, 2001). In this respect, the terminology surrounding fan culture has varied in relation to topic, group, context, and researcher. Therefore, Table 1. provides a brief listing of several key terms and definitions as defined by Scott & Bruner (2006). Furthermore, this study adopts Thorne & Bruner’s (2006, p. 52) notion of ‘fan’ as someone who can be viewed as a “person with enduring involvement with some subject or object, often a celebrity, a sport, TV show, etc”. As evidenced above, literature on fanaticism has climbed steadily over the years, however, not until recently have academics begun to take a closer look at fans and leisure travel behavior (Mackellar, 2006).

Fiske (1992) goes so far as to say that fan culture has its own ‘systems of production and distribution,’ forming a ‘shadow culture economy’. In the early 21st century, fan culture was built predominately around television viewing, with Internet sites taking a backseat to the show itself (Brooker, 2001). In the past decade, the rise of Internet Technology (IT) and its ubiquitous nature has enticed television networks to form ever closer relationships between the two mass media formats (i.e. television and Internet).

TABLE 1
FAN CULTURE DEFINITION OF TERMS

Terms	Definition
Fan	A person with an overwhelming liking or interest in a particular person, group, trend, artwork or idea. Behavior is typically viewed by others as unusual or unconventional but does not violate prevailing social norms.
Fanatic	A person with an overwhelming liking or interest in a particular person, group, trend, artwork or idea that exhibits extreme behavior viewed by others as dysfunctional and violating social conventions
Fandom	A subculture composed of like-minded fans, typified by a feeling of closeness to others with shared interests.
Fanaticism	The level of investment one has in the liking or interest of a particular person, group, trend, artwork or idea. Used in a neutral context in this research.
Cyber-Fan	A fan, typically distinguished from the traditional fan as a newly emergent fan that routinely uses the Internet to supplement his/her involvement with a television show or film.

Additionally, fans in the past were said to use show-related Websites more for basic information (show times, dates, etc.) preferring official sites over the user-generated content of 'fan pages' (Brooker, 2001); although, the reasoning behind this choice was not confirmed. At the time, traditional television fans managed to incorporate the television programming into their everyday lives through some sort of communication, be it face-to-face or CMC. At this juncture, we can safely say fans had yet to reach the level of involvement we see exhibited in fan culture today.

Cursory observation of modern day mass media will likely find efforts made toward the integration of television and the Internet extremely successful. Audience and fan participation on TV show-related Websites has become synonymous to viewing the

program itself. Television networks are trading their traditional end-of-show cliffhangers “tune-in next Tuesday...” for an opportunity to keep audiences ‘tuned-in’ around the clock through the newly emergent world of ‘cyber-fandom’. Grossberg (1992) approaches fandom as a “distinct ‘sensibility’, a special relationship between audience and culture in which the pleasure of consumption is superseded by an investment in difference” (p.50). With the introduction of the Internet, fandom has allowed the previous cohort of television fans to evolve into ‘cyber-fans’ a term coined by Costello (1999). Costello describes a fan culture in which the traditional fan is distinguished from the newly emergent fan that routinely uses the Internet to supplement his/her involvement with a television show. Cyberfandom provides opportunities for invites fans to become even more immersed in fan culture by introducing a plethora of show-related Websites and activities online. These activities vary with the show, television network, or fan site owner/creator. Common activity platforms include, online fan-based- message boards, episode spoilers, musical soundtrack downloads, games, chat, online discussion forums, etc.

Jenkins’ (1992) seminal work, *Textual Poachers*, further supports this notion of involvement in examining how fan cultures participate in extending the narrative world of television programming through fan fiction and other active behaviors. In the past, fans’ behaviors have at times been portrayed as abnormal or obsessive (H. Jenkins, 1992; H. Jenkins, 2006). Despite the various underlying conceptualizations of an inclusive support-based community of fans, researchers have yet to explore tangential benefits and uses of these unique online fan cultures for travel and tourism marketing.

Nevertheless, modern day participatory fan culture provides individuals the opportunity to experience their favorite TV-shows through a support-based community of peers and fans. In this sense fandom continues to build a strong case for the relationship between fans involvement and various forms of mass media (i.e., radio, television, and the Internet) (Baym, 2000; Greenwald & Leavitt, 1984; Sood, 2002).

Introducing and Characterizing the Young Traveler

In the past, academics, such as Beeton, have provided some insight regarding the behavior of various media and film tourism participants (stakeholders, residents, and tourists). However, neither film-induced nor the media-induced tourism literature has given much attention to ‘youth’ as a significant media-induced tourism population. This is of particular interest in light of the fact that today’s youth generation is one the largest consumers of mass media (Flanagin & Metzger, 2008). American youth alone have by the end of their high school years spent more time in front of the television (from 16,000 to 20,000 hrs) than in the classroom (14,000 hrs) (Comstock, 1999). Furthermore, youth are enjoying increased mobility, technology that reinvents itself extremely quickly, and more financial stability than ever before (Pritchard & Morgan, 1996). Combining youths’ propensity toward travel, participation in fan culture and preferred use of Internet and digital communication mediums (Clausing, Kurtz, Prendeville, & Walt, 2003), it would behoove the travel and tourism industry to further examine youth as a potential as media-induced tourist population.

The dramatic growth of youths' participation in travel and tourism over the past decade has given rise to a new dynamic and economically significant Youth Tourism market (Student Youth Travel Association, 2007). For instance, the average number of trips taken by young people increased from 6.2 in 2002 to 7.3 in 2007 (Richards, 2008). According to the World Tourism Organization (UNTWO, 2008), youths total average travel expenditure rose nearly 40 percent between 2002 and 2007. Theuns (1991, p. 4) suggests that "youth tourism is largely the product of a liberal, individualistic, and affluent society"; where "the last 30 years...have seen the emergence of a specialized market in travel products for the young" (Aramberri, 1991, p. 6). As of today the youth travel market is worth over \$135 billion annually, which accounts for almost 20 percent of global travel and tourism today (Richards, 2008).

Important, is the term 'youth' and how it is defined in the travel and tourism context. Previous literature involving youth and travel (usually family vacationing) has described youth as individuals in their early teens (13-15) to adults in their early 30's (30-33) (Bonsall, 2004; March & Woodside, 2005). The Student Youth Travel Association (SYTA) considers 'youth' anyone under the age of 25 (2008), where as the World Tourism Organization suggests with the recent rise in 'flashpackers' (older backpackers with bigger budgets), the 'youth travel' market can be extended to adults in their early 30's. Although numerous reasons would allow 'youth' to be defined differently, this study focuses on the fans of a specific television show, which scored highly among teens and female viewers ages 12-34 (Neilson TV Ratings, 2007). Therefore, the term 'youth' based on the show's reported ratings and in comparison with

previous definitions described above, is adopted loosely to describe the show's fan population of individuals under 35.

Interestingly, much of the controversy over a clear definition of 'youth' travelers can be attributed to cultural and educational norms. For decades the United States has trailed other countries in the promotion of youth travel (Field, 1999; Reisinger & Mavondo, 2004b). Today, young people are undertaking long trips, primarily to increase their knowledge of the world as supported more so now than ever before by the American education system. More than one-third of all trips taken by young people are motivated by the desire to explore, work or study abroad (Richards, 2008). In many other non-U.S. countries youth travel is experienced more as a rite of passage, and is instilled in youth from both a educational as well as cultural standpoint (Cairns & Menz, 2007; Reisinger & Mavondo, 2004a). Regardless of the reasoning, youth accommodation suppliers have taken notice of this fast emerging market increasing their youth accommodation capacity by 50 percent in 2006 (Richards, 2008).

Despite the outstanding growth in the Youth Tourism market, their economic significance and predicted future growth, youths' travel behavior continues to receive marginal and sporadic attention from academics across the globe, often dismissed for assumed lack of financial resources and unfamiliar decision-making behavior. Young tourists compared with their adult counterparts are said to share both similarities and differences (Pastor, 1991). For example, Furtwangler ((1991), quoted in Carr, 1998) suggests that 'interest in sporting activities and recreation in particular sets them [young tourists] apart from the rest of the [tourist] population.' Josiam et al. (1998) suggest that

the young U.S. tourists they studied felt that financial constraints were one of their main concerns when deciding when and where to take a vacation. According to Vogt (1976) and Hudson & Gilbert (1999), these same financial constraints are major barriers for adults planning travel and vacations as well. Even with financial concerns, the UNTWO (2008) claims that youth travelers spend more per trip than the average tourist.

Where is all of this money coming from? The U.S. Department of Labor and Bureau of Labor Statistics reported a significant rise in youth employment, ages 12 -17, between the years of 1997 and 2000, and projects youth employment will continue to rise well into the 21st century. A number of youth acquire jobs for self-preservation, however, the majority of youth receive financial support from parents or guardians, are not burdened by major financial commitments, have more discretionary income than other market segments (Pritchard & Morgan, 1996), and are more likely to spend a greater percentage of this income on leisure and tourism than their adult counterparts (Aramberri, 1991). The current impact of youth consumerism on the travel and tourism industry is evidenced by a global volume growth of 3-5% a year and a spending increase of 8% a annually, indicating that the youth market is growing faster than several other travel segments combined (Richards, 2008). Further evidenced in recent poll by Harris Interactive (2008), annual spending for youth ages 13-21 reached \$120 billion in 2007. As the first to capture the economic impact and destination data about U.S. travelers in the 12 to 18 years of age submarket, the Student and Youth Travel Research Institute (SYTR-I) (2007) reported that a majority of 12 to 18-year-old travelers in the U.S. take at least one significant group trip each year without parents, spending almost \$10 billion

annually. According to the survey, more than 60% of respondents indicated that the 12 to 18-year-olds in their households had taken an overnight group trip in 2005, spending an average of \$417. Those who purchased a tour package (44%) spent on average \$495 (\$427 on the package and \$68 on incidentals); those who did not (56%) spent an average of \$355 (Student Youth Travel Association, 2007). Results from U.S. Census Bureau data, a total population of 30 million 12 to 18-year-old school age travelers took approximately 25 million trips without their parents in 2005 and spent \$9.8 billion. This vast market represents a significant opportunity in youth tourism marketing.

Youth expenditure is also more likely to benefit local economies, given that travelers in this market segment are more inclined to travel off the beaten track and, therefore, to spend in non-tourist areas. This generation of tourists has been characterized as more adventurous than the previous cohort of travelers, and plays a crucial role in the development of a destination's tourism product (Intel International Group Ltd., 2006). Studies show that once a young person becomes an avid traveler, he or she carries this throughout their lifetime (Intel International Group Ltd., 2006). Taking into consideration youths' disposable income warrants a more comprehensive study of specific youth travel and tourism sectors (e.g. media-induced tourism) in which youth participate. Therefore, it would be beneficial to further investigate, identify and test the different facets of youths' online information search behavior in order to more effectively communicate with and satisfy the information needs of youth in travel and tourism.

Travel and Information Search Online

Travel planning implies a 'dynamic' and 'contingent' travel information search process (Pan & Fesenmaier, 2003) where variation in consumer characteristics and decision contexts yields variation in consumers' search in travel and tourism markets (Öörni, 2004). Decisions about which travel information sources to use can be overwhelming, especially with the enormity of options and the numerous marketing schemes employed to reel in potential travelers. Snepenger, Meged, Snelling and Worrall (1990) suggest that most travelers' information search processes in the travel and tourism context are influenced by four major factors: 1) vacation group composition; 2) relatives and/or friends at a destination; 3) prior knowledge or visits to the destination; and, 4) destination novelty. Because consumers' selection of information sources is heavily influenced by multiple factors, consumers are also more likely to utilize several information sources to negotiate these factors and facilitate their travel information search process (Bonsall, 2004; Chorus, Arentze, Molin, Timmermans, & Van Wee, 2006; Nichols & Snepenger, 1988). Furthermore, Öörni (2004) posits that search is more often a cumulative process in which those who seek information from one source will also turn to others. This is evidenced by the nearly 80 million Americans who research their travel options online (2005).

Information search has been identified as one of the primary reasons for Internet use (Flanagin & Metzger, 2001). Therefore, it is important that marketers understand the information requirements and processes of consumers to ensure Website effectiveness for consumer decision-making. According to Peterson, Balasubramanian,

and Bronneberg (1997), the Internet provides users the capability to inexpensively store and retrieve vast amounts of information. More importantly, the Internet facilitates a highly efficient and effective way of searching, organizing, sharing, and disseminating this stored information. In recent years, the Internet has become known for its interactivity and creation of virtual and social networks. Despite the vastness of the Internet, “information available through it has no value unless there are efficient mechanisms for identifying, retrieving, and organizing that information” (Peterson & Merino, 2003). Moreover, customizing these facets to accommodate different user groups is a key element in online marketing.

A study conducted by the Travel Industry Association (TIA) estimated that 56 percent of over 200 million adults in the U.S. currently use the Internet (2005). An even greater number (93%) of Americans between the ages of 12 and 17 are also Internet users (Lenhart, Madden, Macgill, & Smith, 2007). Statistics often inform us of *who*, *how many* and sometimes even *why* Internet users exhibit online information-seeking behavior, but fail to provide sufficient information on the *how* and *when* this online behavior is invoked. For many young travelers, searching for travel information can be a daunting task. Research indicates that youths information search behavior is heavily influenced by the relationships established in mass media, specifically between Internet and film or television.

Research conducted on the information-seeking behavior of youth both on- and off-line is surprisingly limited despite the fact that over 88 percent of American Internet users are between the ages of 12 and 29 (Fox, 2006). A majority of the material

reviewed describes a gap in knowledge concerning youths' use of Internet technology as a part of their information-seeking process. Although, each body of literature is uniquely different in methodology, sample group, and findings, all studies discuss the need for more extensive research.

Recent studies conducted by the Pew Internet & American Life Project explore the Internet's growing role among teenagers. In the past, youth as well as adults have sought face-to-face social interactions to help aid their information-seeking process (Lenhart & Madden, 2007). However, with the exploding popularity of social networking Websites, the Internet's largest impact has been connecting users for advice and the sharing of valuable experiential information (Fox, 2007; Horrigan & Rainie, 2006; Lenhart & Madden, 2007; Macgill, 2007). Subsequently, the Internet has evolved into an information highway and breeding ground for various social networks, such as Myspace, Facebook and LiveJournal. Internet use among youth has become an everyday addiction versus a once a week necessity. According to a 2007 survey, approximately 93% of youth are online, and when asked 89% of online teens said that the Internet and other devices like cell phones, iPods, and digital cameras make their lives easier (Macgill, 2007). Because of the wealth of persuasive messages targeted specifically at young consumers, youth have become less dependent on adults as direct information sources (Valkenburg, 2000), and are likely more dependent on the direct and subliminal messages of mass media advertisements to help facilitate their online information searches. Youth are no longer receiving information just through well-placed magazine ads and perfectly timed commercials, but also through text messages,

online social networks, randomly placed URL addresses and radio sponsors, and most importantly the relationship between television and Internet technology (Eastin et al., 2008; Flanagin & Metzger, 2008). This is especially important concerning to youths online travel information search behavior in the context of media-induced tourism.

Youth and Media Usage

A number of academics have concentrated their efforts toward youth and media consumption due to the rapid adoption and use of digital media formats. Previous areas of research have included online usage, identity formation, perceptions of credibility, as well as responsibility and independence within specific digital media formats (Buckingham, 2008). In comparison to past generations, today's youth, also known as N-Geners, Nexters, Millennials, Generation Y and Generation Next, have been characterized as exceptionally curious, self-reliant, contrarian, smart, focused, able to adapt, high in self-esteem and globally oriented individuals (Clausing et al., 2003). Much of the change between generations is said to have stemmed from youths' fundamental preference for interactive versus broadcast media formats (Clausing et al., 2003; Tapscott, 1998). For example the number of computer and Internet users is three times higher among 16–24 year olds versus persons aged 55–74 (Eurostat, 2005). These characteristics have revealed a population of young consumers who find power and knowledge in the Internet because of its distributed or shared delivery system rather than a hierarchical one. This appreciation for shared power is central to youths' online information-seeking behavior.

Previously, youths' online information searches have been structured and did not stray far from the original search query (Tapscott, 1998). However, now youth 'surf' the Internet very similar to channel surfing their favorite television shows (Herring, 2008; Tapscott, 1998). With rapid advances in technology, youth have become accustomed to a hypermedia or a more interactive form of learning and information search. In a recent study by Harris Interactive (2008) close to one-fourth of U.S. youth ages 15-21 said they had used the Internet to read a newspaper or access an online magazine the previous day. Previous studies have found that youth rely heavily on graphical images and representations on Websites, similar to those seen on television, to confirm they have found a potential information source (Tapscott, 1998).

Increasingly independent from direct parental and adult guidance (Fox, 2006; Fox & Madden, 2005; Horrigan & Rainie, 2006), youth are relying more on personal knowledge and intuition as well as increased media usage, specifically peer-mediated electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) and online social capital to facilitate and inform their online information search process (Ellison, Steinfield, & Lampe, 2007; Paxton, 1999). Research conducted by Motorola Home & Networks Mobility led Ray Sokola, Chief Technology Officer to the statement that "...millennials want rich media experiences on their own terms, and they are ready for operators and service providers to deliver them now" (eMarketer, 2008a). N-Geners have also shown significant influence over the technology adoption choices of their parents, even after they have left the household (eMarketer, 2008a). Over one third of Millennials admitted to playing a major influential role in their parents' purchase of cable, DSL or satellite services, while more

than 60 suggested they had influence over which HDTV purchases and programming packages (eMarketer, 2008a). While youth obviously engaged in a wide-range of parental decisions, they are also big proponents of seeking information and advice from others their own age (Ellison et al., 2007). According to social capital researchers, in the past five years alone sites such as Facebook, Myspace, and Yahoo!igans! began as a part-time niche activity and have developed into a phenomenon that engages and informs tens of millions of young internet users (Lenhart & Madden, 2007; Pergams & Zaradic, 2006; Prescott, 2006). More than seeking advice through email, users are targeting a vast array of CGM platforms (bulletin boards, ODFs, chat, etc.) to satisfy their information search needs. Youth admit to maintaining these relationships through and with CGM for the easily accessible pool of information they provide (Lenhart, Lewis, & Rainie, 2001; Lenhart & Madden, 2007). This enables youth to access individuals outside of their traditional offline circles, gaining less redundant information, which in turn allows them to broaden their online search queries. Despite youths' self-professed connection to the Internet, research on youth and new media suggest that new media rarely replaces the old (Ramasubramanian & Martin, 2008).

Youth who typically use media such as television, music or the movies more often than not continue to use these media formats regardless of the introduction of newer media such as computers and video games (Livingstone, 2002; Neuman, 1991; Ramasubramanian & Martin, 2008). Instead, youth (supported through mass media) find new and innovative ways in which to intertwine new and old media into their daily routine. For example, television consumption has yet to see a major decline over the

past decade, however, the hazy boundary line between traditional television media and the Internet has increased (Ramasubramanian & Martin, 2008). Bouncing back and forth between media sources, young people are watching television shows on TV, re-watching full episodes online (Davis, 2006; Siebert, 2006), and returning to ‘anticipation’ mode for next week’s episode. For youth ages 15–21 watching TV (68%) and listening to music (67%) is just as common as accessing the Internet and surfing the Web (70%) (Markow, 2008). Equally, 61 percent of American youth spend time each day posting or sending messages on social networking sites (Markow, 2008). Furthermore, in a recent survey conducted by the Pew Internet & American Life project found that 28 percent of multi-channel teens— those who use have access to more than one pathway to friends, usually via cell phones, Internet, texting etc., indicated using these channels when searching for information (Lenhart et al., 2007). Despite youths’ unquestionable involvement with media usage, information regarding youths online information-seeking behavior remains relatively unexplored by academics and marketers and could benefit from additional insight regarding their actual inquires in commonly used mediums such as online communities.

Online Communities

Virtual online communities offer an infinite number of web applications that provide for discussion, often through online discussion forums, chat, bulletin boards etc. They have a purpose, are supported by technology, and are usually guided by norms and policies (Preece, 2000). Previously, online communities have been described as groups

of people who utilize a specific website for a shared purpose (Marathe, 2002). Andrews (2002) posits that community no longer suggests physical space, but instead consists of a set of relationships where people interact socially for mutual benefit. According to Wellman, (1997) online communities are social networks that use computer support as the basis of communication among members instead of face-to-face interaction.

Participation in virtual social networks is undertaken for a variety of reasons, however, despite the underlying cause, these communities or networks are typically “easy to enter and leave, non-exclusive, and have heterogeneous membership” (Andrews, 2002).

Wang, Yu & Fesenmaier (2002) posit that the fluid and dynamic nature of the Internet has created and contributed to a “travel square”, in which more and more travelers are using the Internet to facilitate their travel planning process. Concurrently an increasing number of travel marketers are taking notice of this growing online trend resulting in a significant rise in online travel and tourism products and services.

Virtual online communities can be essential to capturing the right travel market. However, successfully attracting such travel markets rests mainly on marketers attaining a full understanding of both the online community and its’ members (Preece, 2000; Wang et al., 2002). Specifically, who are these members and what are their basic needs? Wang et al. (2002) maintain that within this basic set of needs, online travelers like other online users look to fulfill three fundamental needs, *functional* (fulfilling specific tasks), *social* (interactivity among members) and *psychological* (identity and involvement). While tourism virtual online communities were specifically addressed, tourism marketers may benefit from applying this principle in non-tourism based communities

with a potential travel consumer segment, such as television fan sites, in order to more effectively capture and satisfy all traveling markets. In addition, Kim, Lee & Hiemstra (2004) suggest that an effective way to measure customer loyalty in the context of travel and tourism is using online virtual communities as a tool to learn more about travel consumers.

Marathe (2002) suggests that online communities can be divided into four principle groups or categories; purpose, practice, circumstance, and interest, distinguished primarily by motivation. *Communities of purpose*, include members who are going through the same process or who are trying to achieve similar objectives, usually on transactional sites (i.e. eBay or Bank of America). *Communities of practice* share the same profession, situation, or vocation; whereas *communities of circumstance* practice by position, circumstance, or life experiences rather than profession. Lastly, *communities of interest* comprise individuals who share a common interest or passion, such as college football, gardening or even collecting stamps.

Research Questions

Based on the review of the literature, several research questions were proposed in an attempt to gain a greater understanding of how members of a particular virtual community that attracts a young viewing audience engage in travel information search and decision-making in the context of media-induced tourism.

Q₁: *Do members of a fan-based online community engage in travel-related conversations, and if yes, how do they use these conversations to inform their travel decision-making process?*

Q₂: *What are the prominent topics of discussion among members?*

Q₃: *How do members view virtual communities as information sources in comparison to more conventional information sources (e.g. books, newspapers, magazines etc.)?*

Q₄: *What do these online travel conversations reveal about members' travel decision-making behavior?*

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

When selecting the methodology under which to conduct this research it was important to remember that the majority of the literature on fans and fan culture has been conducted offline. Research conducted on fans in an online environment consists mostly of very basic statistical findings, such as how the number of fans that have accessed, visited, or are members of online fan communities. In order to extend knowledge about fan culture online a qualitative approach was selected to explore how fans utilize online fan communities for personal agendas, such as travel planning and travel information search. Therefore, an exploratory study was conducted with a research design and data collection methodology that applied a qualitative ‘netnography’ or internet ethnography approach (Kozinets, 2002).

Netnography, is an innovative qualitative research methodology that adapts ethnographic research techniques to the study of cultures and communities emerging through computer mediated communications (Kozinets, 2002). Previously used as a marketing research technique, “netnography” accesses public information through online forums to identify and understand the needs and decision-making behavior of specific online consumer groups. Several advantages for taking a “netnographic” versus traditional ethnographic approach include unobtrusivity, less time to conduct, less costly, and potentially more detailed or descriptively rich (Kozinets, 2002).

Television Show & Website Selection

Rapidly advancing, CMC technology such as chat rooms, forums, blogs etc., are increasingly recognized as a preferred alternative information source, providing personal reviews, opinions, suggestions, etc. to users. Young people frequently participate in online conversations to discuss their interests (Lenhart et al., 2001; Lenhart et al., 2007). Television is ever more targeted at today's youth and television shows increasingly provide online sources for fans. An example of such a television show is *One Tree Hill*.

One Tree Hill, introduced by the CW (then WB) Network, is a classic teenage drama series, with popularity contests, substance abuse behavior, and dysfunctional relationships with parents, friends, and the educational system. Almost immediately after OTH's official launch, audiences began creating fan-based Websites dedicated to discussing the latest plot twists, predicting upcoming episodes, and engaging in celebrity gossip. OTHForums.com, just one of the numerous fan-based sites, serves as a virtual meeting ground where members can openly discuss their thoughts and feelings about OTH and non-OTH related topics through interactive communication (McWherter & Priest, 2007).

The television show, *One Tree Hill*, and the Website, OTHForums.com, were selected as the context of this study based on the following criteria.

Television Show

1. The show conducts on-location' (i.e. not in studio) film production
2. Filming takes place in the United States
3. The show has aired within the last 5 years

4. The show has a documented history of media-induced tourism
5. The show has an active fan-based Website, with an online discussion forum
6. The show has a target audience between the ages of 15-22 years

Using a combination of three search engines, Yahoo!, Google, and MSN, more than a dozen potential fan-based Websites were identified. After filtering the Websites by their activity, Websites identified as having a “non-active” status, were discarded from the list. The following criteria suggested by Kozinets (2002) were adapted to review and select one of the three remaining ‘active’ Websites (OTHForums.com, OneTreeHillOnline.com and OneTreeHillFans.com).

Website

1. Forum is used by fans 15-22 years old, the main demographic group of the show's audience.
2. Forum members discuss media-induced travel and/or tourism directly or indirectly related to OTH
3. High “traffic” of postings
4. Large numbers of discrete message posters
5. Detailed or descriptively rich data
6. Between-member interactions of the type required by the research question

Preliminary research had reconfirmed that all of the above criteria are currently being met by both the television show, *One Tree Hill* and the Website, OTHForums.com.

Data Collection Methods and Analysis

Data was gathered from late Spring to early Summer 2007 and involved reviewing, downloading and printing transcripts of online postings to OTHForums.com. Preliminary browsing of the forum discussion threads revealed a *Filming* forum with numerous discussion topics connected to media-induced travel tourism.

Analysis began with shuffling through an endless pile of fan-crazed transcripts in an attempt to identify surfacing patterns within the data. Subject threads in the Filming forum were manually counted, coded and assigned alphabetically to explanatory themes in order to create more focused sub-sets of data. Attention was paid to the status given to each member and the frequency with which that category of community member posted. Members were either ranked based on their personal number of postings to the forum's Website. Within the threads, attention was paid to the use of eWOM as a factor in travel information search, as well as specific online community characteristics, which have the potential to influence travel decision-making behavior. Additional data was inscribed based on review and observation of the community and forum conversation. Specifically, each thread and its subsequent postings were summarized based on members' interactions and meanings, the topic of discussion and if and how these conversations related to travel and tourism.

Prior to coding the data, a cursory review of the data was completed to identify which to data was to be kept for further analysis and which needed to be discarded based on the research objective of the study. This step was critical considering that this specific online communication platform is notorious for its 'casual social elements

(Kozinets, 2002), suggesting that conversations or messages be classified first as either primarily social or informational, and also as primarily on-topic or primarily off-topic (i.e. pertaining to the research questions posed) (Kozinets, 2002; Mann & Stewart, 2000). Therefore, all data collected was reviewed in what Kozinets refers to as the initial “grand tour” analysis. This very important step provided for intense analytical efforts to be focused on data that directly pertained to media-induced travel.

Coding

After downloading the data, over the course of several weeks, transcripts were reviewed and coded. The coding process revealed 84 active subject threads with four prominent, recurring themes. Each thread was coded by the initial posting and was later confirmed through analysis of subsequent postings. In order to simplify the data collection process, postings were only coded under one theme based on the dominance of the subject matter in the discussion. Several postings could have been cross-categorized due to a change in discussion topic. In the event this happened, and the initial posting did not reflect the subject thread’s overall topic of discussion, it was re-categorized by the dominant theme that emerged. For example, a thread discussion first post began with a conversation about dining suggestions, but later switched to filming dates and locations, where the majority of the postings were the latter, the thread was then re-categorized under the *Film Dates & Viewing* sub-theme.

Observation

In order to observe and analyze new threads and postings, using the discursive data from previously coded and analyzed discussions, a twice-weekly 'real-time' observation schedule, Wednesday evenings between 9:30p.m. to 11:30p.m., (following the airing of an OTH episode) and Saturday mid-mornings 9:30a.m to 11:00a.m was created. Observation was conducted during the second half of OTH's 2006-2007 season. The purpose of the continued observation was to (a) identify new subjects/threads (b) identify new postings under already coded threads and (c) note the timeliness and 'tone' in members' responses.

Ethics and Positionality

A critical difference between netnographic research and that of traditional ethnographic methods is mindfulness by the researcher that the online content being observed or evaluated represent only the communicative actions of an individual or community, not the complete set of observed acts (Kozinets, 2002).

From an ethical standpoint, consideration was paid to privacy, confidentiality, appropriation of others' personal stories, and informed consent (Sharf, 1999) during this research process. Two of the most notable concerns in conducting netnographic research pertain to (1) are online forums considered a private or a public domain, and, (2) what constitutes "informed consent" in cyberspace? In order to address these issues beforehand, several very important questions were asked. Can the forum be accessed and assessed without community membership? Do users/members list personal profiling

details in postings or avatars, and can this information be selectively hidden from public view? Furthermore, could “informed consent” be obtained in an undisruptive manner, and was it necessary given the objectives of the study?

During initial exploration of OTHForums.com it was noted that membership was not required to access and read forum subject threads and postings, as it was publicly accessible, but was necessary to participate in forum discussion. The Forum gives members the option to provide, a Username, location (e.g. Belgium or Virginia Beach, VA), picture or avatar, and a favorite quote, as part of their posting profile identification. cursory observation revealed that members were at a minimum required to provide a username, and therefore could choose not to provide additional profile information if privacy was a major concern. Taking into consideration that the majority of the postings reviewed would be analyzed after the fact, that conversations were public, and that requesting informed consent would indeed disrupt the nature flow of conversation, an element under review, it was decided that obtaining informed consent was not necessary at this juncture.

In terms of positionality, research was conducted as a ‘lurker.’ Lurking is a term derived from CMC literature describing the commonly accepted practice of spending time in an online space observing interaction patterns and reading postings. Lurkers are seldom if at all active in discussion by choice and are recognized as participants through their passive attention or observation rather than their active contribution (Mann & Stewart, 2000; Nonnecke & Preece, 2003; Sharf, 1999). Literature on lurking suggests that there are distinct advantages and disadvantages to conducting research in this

manner. For example, a lurker position affords the researcher the ability to review postings and ‘listen’ in on interactive discussion without needing to participate in discussion. In this position, the researcher can avoid placing oneself in direct interaction with community members.

Whether it is possible to understand the full extent of their excitement, disappointment, and sometimes frustration as an ‘outsider’ to the community, is difficult to assess from any standpoint. Do we as researchers have the right to study this group of people, passing judgments, assigning labels and levels to their personal conversations? Grappling with questions such as these, would prove interesting as the project progressed. In time, I was able to feel less like a foreigner and more like a silent member of this vibrant continuously growing community.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

OTHForums.com

The online discussion forum examined in this study, OTHForums.com (McWherter & Priest, 2007), exists as a hypertext link named “Forums” on the parent site OneTreeHillFans.com also known as and accessible via OTHFans.com. Both OTHFans.com and OTH Forums.com were created in 2003 by owners Bryan McWherter, Nic-Isaac Priest and Patrick Priest. Although a detailed mission statement for the Website was not available, the results of this study suggest that the site serves as a virtual meeting ground, where members are encouraged to openly discuss their thoughts and feelings about anything related OTH through interactive communication. The forum site also provides members an opportunity to discuss non-OTH related topics in specifically designated forums. In addition, OneTreeHillFans.com provides members and guests with the latest OTH news including links to recent articles on cast members, upcoming movies starring OTH actors/actresses and information on OTH’s current and upcoming filming season. For fun members and guests have access to videoed cast interviews, episode spoilers, and most importantly a ritually updated self-revolving OTH picture gallery. OTHFans.com also claims to be the first and only Website to deliver OTH news straight to your cell phone where membership and specific service providers are not required but individuals must have texting and Internet capabilities. Currently the OTHForums.com site is maintained by a staff of 25, ranging from an Assistant Site

Manager to a Content Developer and News Editors. The forum site also employs three levels of forum moderators, including one Head Moderator, three Super Moderators and eight basic Moderators. In addition to running and maintaining the forum site, these individuals (also fans) facilitate and monitor forum discussion, answer questions, and provide technical support.

In order to post or actively participate on the forum site users must gain membership to the site by registering through a link available on the OTHForums Website. Registrants are required to review and agree to the forum and Website rules presented in order to proceed with the registration process. Basic registration includes creating a Username and password; providing an email address and birthday (year optional); and selecting options in various categories such as language, page theme, newsletters, topics and postings (i.e. number viewable per page) and User to User (U2U) interaction (e.g. instant messaging). After successfully completing registration, members can then view their forum mail “Inbox” and make edits and updates to their profile. This is especially important because when posting or sending messages within the forum, certain profile information is visible to other members. Editable profile information includes personal Website addresses, instant messenger IDs (e.g. AIM, ICG, Yahoo, and MSN), current location, your favorite OTH Quote, Avatar URLs, a short biography and a personal digital signature. Additionally, OTHForums has a user ranking system in which members are assigned a ranking based on the number of total postings they made on the forum site. Each rank has its own status and its own amount of stars. Below are the user rank settings for the OTHForums Website (see Figure 1).

FIGURE 1
OTHFORUMS.COM USER RANKINGS

Why haven't I posted yet?	D	0 Posts
Newbie	D	1 Posts
Junior Member	DD	25 Posts
Member	DDD	100 Posts
Senior Member	DDDD	500 Posts
Posting Freak	DDDDD	2000 Posts
Posting 24/7	DDDDD	3500 Posts
I should own stock in this place!	DDDDD	5000 Posts

Among the data, user rankings indicate a majority of the postings within the Filming forum were understandably posted by newer members with either “Junior” or “Member” status. The second largest group of posters included “Newbies”, “Senior”, and “Posting Freak” members. A limited presence was noted by members with a “Posting 24/7” ranking.

In general, forums are divided into five categories, Site Related, The Show, Cast, 5th Annual James Lafferty Charity Basketball Game, and General, each containing anywhere between one and eleven forums. Within each forum is a number of subject threads, usually between 50 and several hundred, and within each subject thread are anywhere between two and several hundred to a couple thousand postings. When posting in any specific forum each post will include the member’s username, member rank, location, if the member is on-or offline, their favorite OTH quote and self-selected avatar. As some of these items are optional in members’ profiles, at a minimum postings include username, member rank and on- or offline status. If members have additional profile information available, a profile button will appear at the bottom of their posting,

as seen in Figure 2. These options allow members to communicate more privately, find out more about the poster via their profile or locate all the postings for one specific member.

FIGURE 2
FORUM POSTING OPTIONS BAR



Research was conducted under the Filming (currently Experience OTH In-Person) forum, examining 84 subject threads and 1,476 postings among these threads. The average length of each posting was between one and five sentences long. All subject threads and a majority (1,281) of the postings within the Filming forum contained discussion directly (e.g. travel dates) or indirectly (e.g. contact info. for casting agency) related to the research questions posed. Very little conversation among members strayed far from the context of media-induced tourism, however, when this was in fact the case, conversations most often pertained to general celebrity gossip or a discussion previously started and understood by only the members involved.

Emergent Themes

An analysis of the data identified four dominant recurring themes and four sub-themes. The first theme, 'Filming', encompasses a wide variety of topics directly related to live film production; and is divided into the following sub-themes: Extras, Film Dates

& Viewing, Film Locations and Cast & Crew. The second theme, 'Travel to Wilmington' discusses physical transportation and common motivations for travel. The next theme, 'Wilmington: Accommodations, Dining and Tourism' delves into the world of budget hotels, delicious dining options and must-see places to be. The final theme, 'Post Wilmington Trips,' briefly discusses postings of stories, pictures and gratitude shown by forum members.

Filming

Nothing is more exciting to the fans of OTH than seeing the creation of the show first hand. The first emergent theme, *Filming*, identified conversations regarding film locations and dates, extras and the cast/crew. It revealed members' willingness to travel long distances, some of overseas, and to acquire U.S. work Visas to become film extras. Forum members, never too tired to chat about their hopes of becoming an extra, longed to stand on the sidelines, or to catch a sneak peek of their favorite OTH celebrities.

Extras

A sub-category under *Filming*, 'Extras' was an especially interesting topic to unearth. For those under the false impression that being selected as an extra on a TV show is something that happens for only the 'lucky ones', you are in for a big surprise. An *extra* is a performer in a film, television show, or stage production who appears in a non-speaking capacity, commonly in the background (e.g. in an audience or busy street scene) ("The Actors Network," 2008). In television, extras are sometimes also known as

"supporting artistes" or "S.A.s". Numerous postings revealed that not only do OTH forums members want to become *extras* on the set of their favorite television show, OTH, but that they are willing, in some cases to travel thousands of miles from countries as far away as Sweden and Thailand for even the slightest opportunity. One forum member writes...*im from Australia and looking at going to Wilmington during late August who do i contact...is there a phone num or can this be done via email...*¹

Alongside forum members' basic desires to become extras, recurring discussions included logistical issues as well, such as *how* to become an extra, specifically *who* to contact, where to send information, *what* are age requirements, *how likely* they were to be chosen etc. A forum member from Canada expresses some distress in understanding the rules that apply to becoming an extra on the set of OTH (see Figure 3).

FIGURE 3
MEMBER POSTING 1

Senior Member ²	question: canadians can or can't extra? I was rllly hoping to go down to wilmington for the third time, but a much longer stay , this summer. i am still not sure if it is going down and I'm extremely bummed and upset about it...buy thot I might find out anywayyy. I read previous pgs of this thread and saw that age rllly doesn't matter. i am 15. but canadian, and rllly wasn't sure if u had to have american citizenship. If no luck finding info here, and im serious that gonna go down, my best bet will be to call fin. And assoc.
No Avatar	
Member Is Offline	

¹ Note: All quotes are reproduced in their original form, including spelling errors and acronyms.

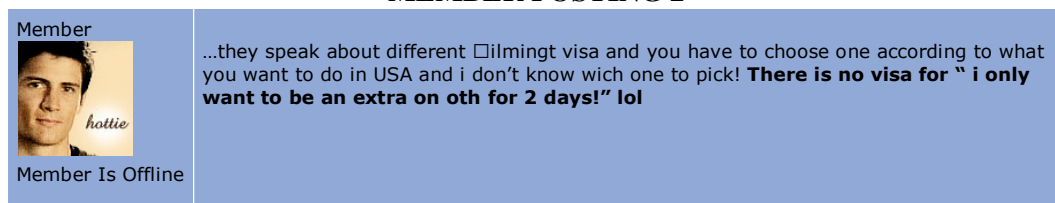
² Note: All profile information has been randomly selected and does not represent to the original posting member.

Some members simply wanted reassurance that they had all taken the appropriate steps to becoming an extra, while others wanted to express excitement over being selected and contacted by the casting company.

Interestingly, a large majority of the posters under this subject thread were non-U.S. citizens (as identified by their profiles, but not included for confidentiality). Therefore, another significant discussion topic among members included how to obtain U.S. employment, specifically U.S. work Visas. One member slightly frustrated makes light of the U.S. Visa process through a little humor (see Figure 4).

FIGURE 4

MEMBER POSTING 2



Surprisingly, the data suggests very few members took the time to read previous postings about the same topic or question, therefore, creating an endless string of unnecessary threads. Nonetheless, the large volume of conversations proved beneficial in identifying an immensely diverse population of media-induced travelers, as members represented over 25 countries in a single subject thread. Forum members in this discussion thread that had previously traveled to Wilmington were instrumental in providing information to other Americans and international members seeking to travel to

Wilmington and become an extra. In general, the conversational tone among members oscillated between frustration in not being eligible to be an extra and panic for those who had not heard back from the casting agency, to humorous and playful.


Film Dates & Viewing

Postings in the Film Dates & Viewing sub-theme addressed inquiries about film production dates and public viewing opportunities. Clearly important to countless members in planning media-induced travel was information on OTH's film production season. Word-of-mouth among members regarding exact film dates was inconsistent, fostering a marked uneasiness. Despite this inconsistency, forum members did not express visible frustration with the responses they received. Instead, members dutifully volunteered to consult outside resources and then return to the forum with more information. For example several members were unsure what days of the week filming for season five would take place, so one member who volunteered to look into it wrote...*I don't know about this year but they have filmed on Sundays before because Chad mentioned it in a DVD over the summer that they weren't able to use the gym on Fridays so they had to give up their Sundays...I'm not for sure but I can totally check into it a holla back you guys...it's so worth knowing...back in a jif!* This situation appeared very common and continued in a cyclical nature until a consensus could be reached. In the meantime, the members making inquiries vowed to "check back" on a regular basis in order to assure they had received the most accurate and current information for their trip planning process. Countless forum members were clear that the opportunity to visit

Wilmington during OTH's film production season was of the utmost importance in selecting travel dates (second to the schedules of other travelers and parents). For example, one forum member inquired *...Heys guys! Does anyone have an exact date when they will start filming? I am trying to plan my trip but I don't want to go too soon if they won't be filming or too late...* Did this mean that members would actually forgo taking these trips if the opportunity to view live filming was out not an option? This is highly doubtful. OTH fans were determined to travel to Wilmington, if meant only getting to breathe the same air that OTH actress Sophia Bush *might* be breathing across town. Once, members were thoroughly convinced they had received accurate information, typically the next line of questioning addressed *when* (exact time) and *where* (location) filming would take place. Members who had previously traveled, or more often members who lived in the Wilmington area, provided the most amount of support and information usually through detailed responses like the one posted by one member below (see Figure 5).

FIGURE 5

MEMBER POSTING 3

<p>Posting Freak</p>  <p>Member Is Offline</p>	<p>A good tip when you go down...when you're downtown and you don't know when their filming...</p> <p>Say you're in front of Karen's Cafe...usually theirs parking...(Well they just redid the road so Parking is kinda weird now haha...)...but you will see signs that say "No Parking..." and then a date...that means they're filming there the next day..</p> <p>Also the parking deck on 2nd street and Grace will have signs that say "Crew and Extra Parking"...annnd if you get there early enough in the day you will see "Cinema Catering"...they usually set up on 2nd and Grace across from the parking deck...</p> <p>Again this is just when you are downtown and not sure if their filming...these are some tips 😊 But again if you go down to Front St. they just redid the parking...they turned it from a one way to a two way so be careful..its hectic ha 😊</p>
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Among the responses forum members shared previous experiences of how, when and where *they* had been able to watch live filming. While several members came to the realization while planning their trips that catching a glimpse of live filming was not going to be a viable option for their impending trip, they were more than happy to discuss past ‘scene’ locations instead.

Film Locations

In the next sub-theme, members discussed past ‘scene’ location sites, not to be confused with the ‘live’ filming locations discussed above. Most questions and responses in this category were given in great detail. This forum, more than others, revealed multiple conversations in which more experienced or knowledgeable fans in the forum such as “Senior” or “Posting Freak” members quickly and humbly provided instructions to forum “Newbies” or direct members to locations link listed on the Website’s main page. One Posting Freak member responds to a slightly panicky Newbie, *...no need to stress...you can go on the main part of the site. (othfans.com) and they have a map and everything with the locations...this should be super helpful but if you need more info. just let me know, its no problem.* Other members went as far as providing hand typed (vs. copied from Mapquest etc.) street-by-street directions complete with distance and estimated drive time (see Figure 6). Respondents appeared more than happy to share this information with other members in that most often it allowed them to reminisce about their own previous OTH trips.

FIGURE 6
MEMBER POSTING 4


Junior Member	...The gym is in □ilmingt.... but here are the directions from the studio
No Avatar	Turj left on 23 rd st .06 miles n 23 rd to MLK parkways- left 1.7 miles on MLK to the 74w/□ilmington exit-right .06 miles over bridge to hwy 421 N- right
Member Is Offline	21.1 miles on hwy 421 n to hwy 53- left 6.1 miles on hwy 53 to sunset0right 1 block on sunset to henny st-right

Cast & Crew

Under the third sub-theme, “Cast & Crew,” members sought information regarding the most promising locations around town for celebrity and cast member sightings outside of film production sites. This particular group of threads was fascinating in that conversation took on more of a speculative informational exchange. Confirmed sightings by members on previous media-induced trips were taken at face value as the most promising and accurate responses. In the midst of discussing which cast member frequents which grocery stores and hair salons, it was not uncommon for members to begin spur side conversations about celebrity gossip or basic travel information. For example, one member, after responding about a cast member’s activities, began talking about gas prices on her previous trip to Wilmington *...so im not completely sure what time James gets there but i know he goes to that gym seriously like 5 TIMES a week!! hope that helps...you might waste a lot of gas looking for it and trust me i know about gas!! it cost me a fortune on my last trip, but im going again in two months anyway!! Awww...ILUVOTH...* In addition, forum members posted comments and concerns about celebrities’ negative behavior, but immediately following these


postings with statements of support, praise and understanding for the actor/actress in question (see Figure 7).

FIGURE 7
MEMBER POSTING 5

<p>Junior Member</p>  <p>Member Is Offline</p>	<p>Fans always have really high expectations to the people they see on tv, idolize, and then finally meet. Most of the time, the celebrities (including our cast) won't live up to that 'cause they are people just like us who probably want to live a normal life when they're not filming.</p> <p>Also a lot of fans go to the set even when they're not extras, and that kind of interrupts them at work so I don't blame them for not being all smiles 24/7. That's just not going to happen.</p> <p>Regardless, I think that the whole cast seems great most of the time. So called "bad encounters" I've read has hoenstly not even been that bad. I know I can yell, be a b*tch and whatnot if I have a bad day, I'm sure the same goes for them.</p> <p>Also, don't believe everything you hear or read about them unless you've seen it yourself. People love making up stories about them....</p>
<p>Posting Freak</p> <p>No Avatar</p> <p>Member Is Offline</p>	<p>I have met every single cast member on the show. The only two that I didn't have a good experiance with is, Danneel Harris and Paul Johanson.</p> <p>But.. hey I'm over it and I know if I get to meet them again. I'm sure it's going to be different.</p>

Ironically, the same members who were sympathetic and understanding of the privacy and humanness of the cast & crew also sought them out at their favorite coffee shops and movie theaters just to get peek or an autograph. In the end, forum members appeared more than happy to provide information on cafés, churches and other retail venues frequented by OTH cast and crew (see Figure 8).


FIGURE 8
MEMBER POSTING 6

<p>Member</p>  <p>Member Is Online</p>	<p>OMG..i finally trkd Chad and Kenzie down at the showing of Harry Potter 5 that I went to here in Wilmington....they were looking adorable as usual, although she was alone for awhile because he couldn't get his but off the phone.</p>
---	---

Travel to Wilmington

This thread identified air travel and personal vehicles as the most common mode of transport to Wilmington. Members' unhappiness and complaints about the high cost of airfare were immediately followed with statements of justification, worth and excitement for their upcoming OTH trip. Underage members, for whom independent travel was not ideal, expressed through forum discussion becoming the driving force behind media-induced family road trips and vacations. Members who were able to travel alone or with without parental supervision used the forum to identify other members traveling during the same period. Often forum members expressed interest in arranging shared lodging and other miscellaneous expenses (see Figure 9).

FIGURE 9
MEMBER POSTING 7

<p>Senior Member</p>  <p>Member Is Offline</p>	<p>Im getting an early start on planning my trip to wilmington, anyone interested in sharing hotel costs and maybe some around town transport??? It looks like I'll be there in September...not quite sure yet though?? U2U me if you're interested. I would really appreciate it and its would be cool to meet some people from here!! Thanks in advance 😊</p>
---	---

Additionally, several members discussed being involved or planning annual birthday trips to Wilmington, where as others introduced a new media-induced tourism extreme, moving to Wilmington to be closer to the TV show. One forum member writes *...I can't believe its only 2 week to go before I finally get to move to Wilmington...I know my parents are going to miss me but seriously people...its OTH!!!!* The next theme, Travel to Wilmington, further discusses this topic and provides insight as to who, what, when, why and how forum members planned their trips to Wilmington.

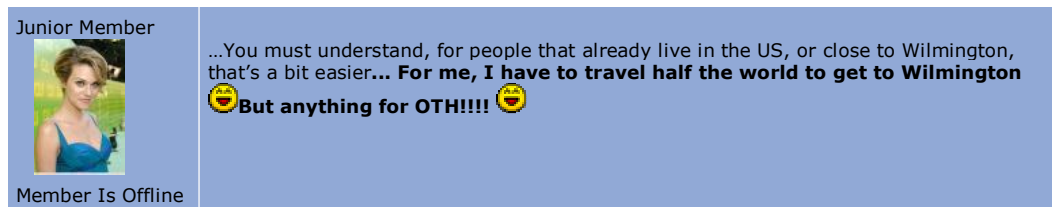
Maneuvering the vast number of postings within this subject thread revealed several prominent topics of discussion. The first of these topics include conversation regarding transportation. Transportation was discussed at great length and detail as to how members planned to travel to and around Wilmington, referring specifically to their physical mode of transportation. Air travel (i.e. by major airline) was by far the most common means of transport to Wilmington and the United States for international travelers. This was usually combined with discussion of a rental car reservation for local transport in and around town (see Figure 10).

FIGURE 10
MEMBER POSTING 8

Newbie	FINALLY!!! Its time!! My bf found us awesome priced plane tickets and a super cheap rental car, except for that stupid extra FEE they MAKE you pay bc were one frickin' year from 25, but whatever...we're going and that's all that matter!!! Only four days left? Does anyone now how far the airport is from Wilmy?? I think we're roadtrippin' it from Raleigh or something...but an idea of how lmany hours would be cool!! Thanks guys and I'll take lots and lots of pics!
No Avatar	
Member Is Online	

Members frequently grumbled about the high costs of air travel or the inability to rent a car due to not meeting the age requirement or additional costs. Regardless, forum members were quick (usually within the same posting) to follow these quasi-complaint statements with expressions of justification, worth and excitement for the opportunity to travel to Wilmington and be part of OTH (see Figure 11).

FIGURE 11
MEMBER POSTING 9



Interestingly, members discussing air travel rarely asked questions about specific airlines, ticket prices or past air travel experiences from other forum members. This is likely attributed to their naivety for financial details, possibly due to age and/or the actuality that they were not responsible for making travel arrangements. With no mention of travel by bus or train, the second most common mode of transport for traveling to Wilmington was by personal vehicle, usually accompanied by friends or family. It was around this time that countless members confessed to being a powerful force behind “spontaneous” and as well as planned family vacations or road trips. Forum members longed to sip coffee in ‘Karen’s Café,’ eat on the park bench were OTH’s ‘Nathan’ proposed to ‘Hailey’, or see it all happen first hand by becoming an



OTH extra. Greeting this as motivation a significant number of postings from faithfully devoted OTH fans were dedicated to either convincing their parents to allow them travel to Wilmington or providing the do's and don'ts of asking, in order to aide other members in their pleas.

Additionally, numerous threads were committed to informing other members of their intent to travel to Wilmington. These postings, usually one-liners, exuded feelings of pride and accomplishment for having completed the travel planning process and often including various smiley emoticons. Conversation among members traveling to Wilmington in the same general timeframe witnessed members making arrangements to meet and experience OTH activities together (e.g. EUE Screen Gems Studio Tour, find film location sites etc.). What's more, forum members frequently made arrangements to share lodging in Wilmington; gleaning in anticipation to meet their new interactive 'family', and comfort in not touring an unknown city alone.

Another fascinating discovery was the number of members who shared information regarding annual trips to Wilmington, many of whom claimed to go each year as part of some sort of birthday tradition. This included members from within the state of North Carolina, as well as other states across the U.S. In addition to annual trips, forum members discussed impending moves to Wilmington. Upon reviewing each posting, only once did a member state that moving was unrelated to OTH, and instead for an internship in the Wilmington area. The remaining postings implied, usually through full and enthusiastic disclosure that the main motivation for relocating was indeed to be closer to OTH. This allows us to view media-induced tourism from entirely

different dimension; were television fans quite literally so enamored by a show, its' cast or filming location that they are willing to up-root their lives, potentially leaving behind friends and friends with the hope of becoming closer to an element of a television show (see Figure 12).

FIGURE 12
MEMBER POSTING 10



<p>Junior Member</p>  <p>Member Is Offline</p>	<p>I'm going Aug. 2-7 ... Aug 2 in my 19th bday 😊 ... its been kind of a ritual for me to go on my bday for the past 3 years, so gotta keep it going 😊</p>
<p>Junior Member</p>  <p>Member Is Offline</p>	<p>Hi XXXX!</p> <p>I have been to Wilmington 4 times in the past year so I know most everything there is to know! I am even moving there in August so if you want some help my MSN name is xxxxxx or you can email me and I will do my best to help you out.</p>

Wilmington: Accommodations, Dining and Non-Media Tourism

This emergent theme summarizes postings that delved into the world of budget motels, delicious dining options, and must-see attractions. Although, very few references to cost were made regarding other areas of the travel planning process, such as airfare, gas or time off from work; many members explicitly sought information on inexpensive accommodations. Forum members often replied with empathetic words accompanied by personal reviews of five star hotels to poorly rated motels. Members

were quick to note quality, comfort, and location in their reviews and inquires. Hotel/motel that were rated rather poorly on quality and comfort, were at times redeemed convenient location to downtown Wilmington, the Riverwalk or most importantly various OTH film site locations (see Figure 13)

FIGURE 13
MEMBER POSTING 11

<p>Member</p>  <p>Member Is Online</p>	<p>my family and i are going to wilmington this july and i really don't know which hotel to pick, where not rich and considering the prices of gas we can't really spend that much on a fancy hotel, so if anyone could give me any names of any hotel with a reasonable price with a reasonable room...lol i dun really a dirty ghetto room lol. if u guys could give me any advises too, that would be greatly appreciated.. 🙏 thanks in advance</p>
<p>Senior Member</p>  <p>Member Is Offline</p>	<p>when I went down there this year for the game, we stayed at the Baymont Inn and it was really clean and pretty cheap...it was \$75 per night and right off of Market Street and easy access to everything and everywhere!</p>

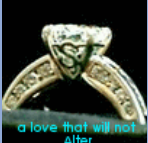

In the end, members' concern for minimal expense and most favorable location in regards to filming locations appeared to outweigh any concern for quality or comfort as deciding factors when booking hotel accommodations. For example, one member writes *...i stayed at the econo lodge.... it was pretty nice n nonexpensive...it was pretty close to karens cafe n the community college.... its like in the middle of everything which was good.*

While some divergence existed on hotel preference, an overwhelming consensus was expressed for dining options. Members recommended a number of diverse dining

options, specifically identifying restaurants and eateries by name. Additionally, forum members provided driving directions and gave detailed accounts of their favorite menu items. A select few even provided tips as to which restaurants they knew were frequented by OTH cast and crew.

Although the dominant topics of discussion in this sub-theme addressed accommodations and dining, members' conversations highly encouraged other non-media tourism options including entertainment and shopping (see Figure 14).

FIGURE 14
MEMBER POSTING 12

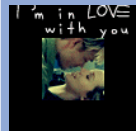
<p>Member</p>  <p>a love that will not alter</p> <p>Location: Florida Member Is Offline</p>	<p>i went to wilmy in march for the charity bball game so everything we did was pretty much OTH related. But the river walk downtown is pretty cool. And really, there is so much to see there as far as filming locations & what not. You could spend all day looking at those! There are several websites that have a lot of good info on Wilmy too. Just google it. There are tons of restaurants downtown & all over really. Other than for OTH, people probably go there for the beaches. There was a restaurant downtown I heard that Chad & Kenzie liked to frequent but I can't remember the name of it! I found it on this board though. <u>I just kept checking back on these forums & reading everything I could about it!</u></p>
<p>Member</p>  <p>Member Is Online</p>	<p>...there is a great Chinese place on Market St. I forgot the name but it's about a mile up from the Motel 6 on the right if you're coming from downtown. Then there is the Golden Egg. They have really good omelettes. You could also try the Water Street Restaurant. That is where Naley went on their first date.</p> <p>For fun, there is a serpentarium if you like snakes and reptiles. That's where Mouth, Skills & Fergie went on dare night. There's the battleship by the river court. There's Jungle Rapids. They have a waterpark, go carts, laser tag & an arcade. You can ride around and see all the filming locations. That's pretty cool.</p>

Often members made suggestions on nearby activities, such as shopping and dining venues that first time travelers might enjoy while waiting for live filming to begin. Suggestions were commonly made in tangent with or based on the location of accommodations or nearby restaurants. Members promoted everything from fun in the

sun on North Carolina beaches and go-cart racing to vintage shopping, Wilmington's famous Riverwalk, and visiting the Serpentarium. Members appeared to be genuinely vested in the happiness and enjoyment of other members during their trips to Wilmington

An important element travel brought to light in this subject thread was the number of members' who were not traveling alone, but instead were direct motivators for family vacations at the shore, quiet weekend getaways at cozy Wilmington Bed & Breakfasts' or 'spontaneous' road trips along the coast. Interesting, the majority of conversations among members in which parents were mentioned as travelers suggested that it was out of necessity. Some expressed excitement for bringing parents along, while others dreaded dragging the parental units but were appreciative of the opportunity to go nonetheless (see Figure 15). Other members' made mention of parents tagging along in order to fulfill their own vacation agenda (spas days, poolside reading, antique shopping etc.) and were merely there as unseen chauffeurs.

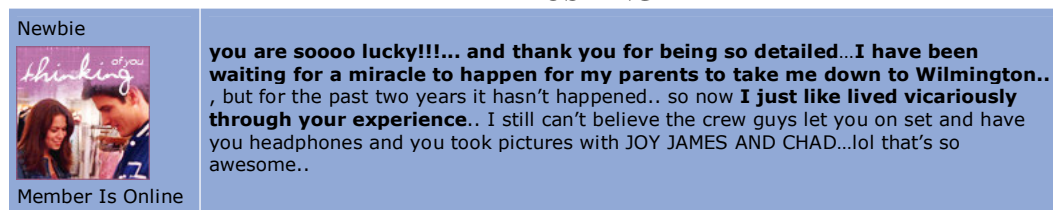
FIGURE 15
MEMBER POSTING 13

Senior Member		<p>hey im leaving for Wilmington on Saturday or Sunday!!! 😄😄😄😄😄😄 (^ha ha ha that looks funny^^ lmao!!) yeah!!! Im so excited!!!!</p> <p>is anyone else gonna be there next week too 🤔</p> <p>...yeah im going with my best friend and my parents *ugh* but theyre not really that bad, plus they said they were gonna do other stuff while we have fun and of course i am going to take a BUNCH of pictures!!!</p>
Member Is Offline		

Post Wilmington Trips

The last major theme, *Post Wilmington Trips*, encompasses an overwhelming number of post-trip stories, pictures, suggestions, and reviews. After weeks and months of dedicated information search, trip planning, checking and re-checking film dates, and well wishes, members dutifully returned to forum discussion as newly and formally informed media-induced tourists, ready to share their newfound knowledge. One member kept a daily journal during her visit to Wilmington and shared her experience with the forum upon return, the following posting in response to that member's journal entries (see Figure 16).

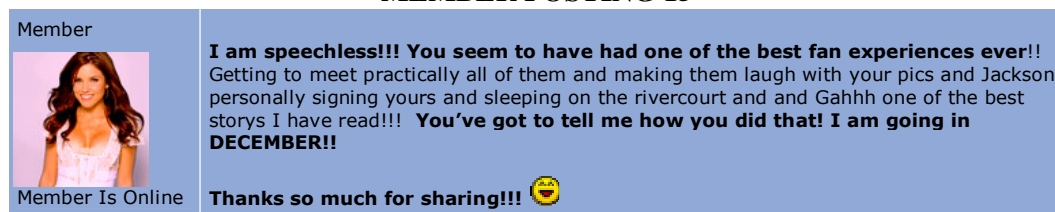
FIGURE 16
MEMBER POSTING 14



Members often thanked their online 'family' for lovingly and faithfully answering all five or 50 of their pre-departure questions; and for members who could only dream of going to Wilmington, these pictures and stories helped sustain their devotion to both OTH and the forum. For example, a member who had just returned said *...im [sic] so glad i joined this forum...I wouldnt have gottn to see pretty much 1/2 the ppl or places without u guys. NOW if anyone has questions...i can ttily help YOU*

out!! OTH is the best.. Additionally, members who were able to provide a detailed account of their visit were looked upon as informants to other members in the trip planning process (see Figure 17).

FIGURE 17
MEMBER POSTING 15



Summary

In summary, the findings of this study identified several prominent topics of discussion among members in this forum included filming, specifically how to become an extra, film dates and public viewing opportunities, information on public sightings of OTH cast & crew, accommodations and dining, post-trips stories, in addition to almost every corner of Wilmington used as a film location. Therefore, in answer to the first research question,

Q₁: *Do members of a fan-based online community engage in travel-related conversations, and if yes, how do they use these conversations to inform their travel decision-making process?;*

assuredly it can be said that members do engage in travel related discussion through these types of communities and even further they often seek clarity to travel planning

questions directly through these online discussion forums. Furthermore, with regard to research question two,

Q₂: *What are the prominent topics of discussion among members?;*

The results indicate that although numerous topics of discussion are present, the majority of forum conversation is devoted specifically to filming, transportation and accommodations, dining and non-media tourism options and post trip stories. Additionally, in response to the third research question,

Q₃: *How do members view virtual communities as information sources in comparison to more conventional information sources (e.g. books, newspapers, magazines etc.)?;*

The results reveal that members likely viewed the forum as a highly credible and friendly source of information, quite possibly preferred over more traditional information sources. In most cases the forums acted as a information source for direct inquiries and responses related to media-induced travel, however, a number of postings such as those found under the Post Wilmington Trips discussion theme, served more as motivational and inspiration support to other members and fans. It was also find that members use the forum for personal and peer review; going beyond inquires of basic information such as directions to a restaurant, but rather if other members felt a restaurant was worth visiting. Moreover, the population of media-induced tourists who either move or are willing to move to Wilmington, indicates the need for further classification of media-induced tourists; where potential categories might include first-

time, annual, and media-induced tourists turned resident. This is important because it pertains to the fourth research question,

Q4: *What do these online travel conversations reveal about members' travel decision-making behavior?;*

as the results indicate that this group of media-induced travelers are very highly influenced by the eWOM of their fellow forum members. Furthermore, conversations reveal that for many members financial resources are a concern, and that although they were not mentioned in conjunction with parents, members often made note of the fact that their media-induced trips to Wilmington were indeed dependent or influenced by a parental presence.

Overall, forum members were courteous, helpful and generally supportive of one another's travel plans and endless barrage of questioning. Although the mood in each thread varied, the conversational tone among members brilliantly managed to sustain something similar to information on caffeine-high, always upbeat.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Travel and tourism researchers have put a tremendous amount of time and effort into identifying and understanding the behavior of travel consumers in the widely diverse markets of the travel and tourism industry. A review of the literature suggested that media-induced tourism, a rapidly growing global phenomenon has tended to focus its attention more on the adult traveling population (Beeton, 2001, 2005; Busby & Klug, 2001; Butler, 1990; Im et al., 1999); as well as on destination impacts and on-location tourist behavior. Further review of the literature revealed a narrow amount of research that indicated youth as participants in the media-induced tourism market (Brooker, 2001; Cousins & Andereck, 1993; Hotz, 2008 ; McWherter & Priest, 2007), but had yet to adequately address the presence and participation of youth travelers as a significant media-induced tourism population. Additionally, no research had been conducted thus far to examine the online travel information search and decision-making process of media-induced travelers, specifically that of youth travelers. Furthermore, as one of the largest media consumption populations today, no studies had begun to explore the relationship between mass media formats (i.e. television and the Internet) and their potential influence on young media-induced travelers and their online fan culture.

Therefore, this thesis proposed that although travel information search, media-induced tourism, fan culture, and youth travel have been studied to some extent in the past, marketers and academic could benefit from exploring how the youth travel market

both consumes *and* utilizes mass media communication platforms (i.e. Internet) within the travel and tourism industry, and specifically within the context of media-induced tourism. This study took a qualitative netnographic approach to explore how the manner in which young media-induced travelers as self-identified fans of a particular television show, *One Tree Hill*, utilize online discussion forums to facilitate their media-induced travel information search and decision-making process. Furthermore, this study investigated specifically what travel related topics were discussed and what kinds of interactions were prominent.

The results of this study identified several ways in which virtual communities and online discussion forums are consumed by media-induced travelers to inform tourism-related decisions. Most importantly, the results reveal that media-induced travel conversations take place extensively online, and they largely occur outside of specific communities constructed and/or dedicated to travel and tourism. The data revealed four emergent themes and four sub-themes in which conversations spanned a wide array of topics, ranging from filming to general tourism information, and provide information at a level of detail not available on general tourism sites. In addition, the conversations include descriptions of direct experiences of fans at the destination and, thus, reflect high credibility. The results show an immense complexity in the decisions of the media-induced tourists studied, and further indicate that media-induced travel decisions are critically influenced by a social community of fans.

The results of the study also indicate that eWOM plays a critical role in media-induced tourism, both before and after trips. The travel conversations observed across

all themes revealed that youth are active participants and a significant population for media-induced tourism. If they cannot travel by themselves, they seem to try to at least influence parents in their vacation decision-making. The findings also show that these young media-induced tourists seek travel information through online forum discussions in predominately a direct question and answer format. Moreover, forum members at all levels never hesitated to offer unsolicited travel and tourism advice; contributing to an overall reciprocal exchange of information. Travel conversations within the forum can be characterized as highly enthusiastic, patient, and appreciative. Members also exhibited courteous, helpful, and supportive behavior for one another's travel planning process and endless barrage of questioning. They also suggest that media-induced tourists are likely to engage in activities at the destination that reach beyond visiting film locations.

As far as motivations to engage in these online conversations is concerned, the findings largely confirm the motives discussed by Wang and Fesenmaier (2004) in that they show clearly that members do not only have functional information needs but also participate in travel-related eWOM to derive social status, obtain support, relive trips and otherwise enjoy themselves.

Conclusion and Implications of Thesis

This thesis explored the rather unfamiliar and under-researched world of young media-induced travelers. An integrative Web-based research design using netnography approach provided the means through which to examine youth as both fans and media-

induced travelers. Additionally, the purview of this study investigated the extent to which the travel information search process of this particular group can be seen as an extension of travelers' fan involvement in an online virtual community.

While several important travel topics emerged in the results of this study, future studies in media-induced tourism should seek to explore several dynamics in greater depth. These may include, travelers personal interests and fan involvement; travelers and travel companions; travelers and accessibility to informational resources; as well as travelers and financial resources and limitations. Additionally the study of media-induced tourism in Wilmington could benefit from raising questions such as,

- How do media-induced travelers' personal interests in film characters or cast members affect film-induced travel?
- Do travel companions (i.e. friends v. parents) affect media-induced travel choices and financial resources?
- What other informational sources do fans utilize when planning trips, and how reliable do they consider each of these sources?
- What existing roadblocks do international media-induced travelers face when planning media-induced travel, and how can they be mitigated?

In what ways does the community and City of Wilmington or State of North Carolina cater to potential media-induced travelers, and are tourists aware of these options/services?

While this study addresses some of the ways in which virtual communities and discussion forums are utilized to inform tourism-related decisions, it only scratches the

surface of unexplored data regarding online travel conversations in the context of media-induced tourism. The observation of one online discussion forum and its travel conversations does not provide a comprehensive enough data set to identify all the ways in which travel conversations function, and therefore future online studies may seek to supplement this data by incorporating additional forums and possibly other forms of CMC such as blogs.

Furthermore, this study's media context (OTH) suggests that conclusions must be considered valid only within this specific media context. A cross-comparison of one or more OTH websites producing a larger sample of comments would be beneficial. In addition, comparisons with other shows would increase the reliability of the findings. Further, classification of conversations based on the involvement of the communicators and their experience as media-induced tourists could lead to new insights. As with all research, particularly qualitative in nature, data collection and interpretation filtered through the subjective lens of the author, obscuring certain data and phenomena while privileging others.

Overall, the study shows that observing online media-induced travel conversations is a fruitful exercise to expand our knowledge of media-induced tourism, the role of youth as independent travelers or influencers of travel decision-making, the role of eWOM in travel, and the structure of travel decisions in which a filming location is the central aspect. Further, the findings suggest that tourism marketers at destinations with media-induced tourism should carefully monitor such conversations to identify information needs of potential travelers.

This thesis had incorporated the findings from several research disciplines such as marketing, communications, information systems and psychology to develop a sound framework toward understanding media-induced travelers, youth, fan culture and media usage. The current research, although still humble in representation, provides strong results in the evaluation of the divergent relationships between media-induced tourism, young travelers, and online information search, and affords the following theoretical and practical implications:

From a theoretical perspective,

- this thesis supports the notion that youth are a significant market for media-induced tourism;
- that youths' travel information search reflects and continue to foster media usage and the digital predisposition of their generation;
- most importantly, these studies stress the role of word-of-mouth, specifically eWOM in media-induced tourism;
- and, that fans as media-induced travelers' have the ability to play a significant role in the travel information search and decision-making process of other young media-induced travelers.

From a practical point of view, the findings of this thesis suggest that young media-induced travelers are a global ambitious market whose investment in mass media in continuously redefined and supported through multiple digital and mass media

formats. As a result, industry professionals would benefit from several insights, specifically,

- professionals should view young media-induced travelers as a highly motivated, loyal target market willing to spend multiple extensive periods of time at the destination;
- they need to continuously observe online conversations as the data derived from fan-based information sources lend insight regarding information needs, planning habits, travel preferences and experiences at the destination;
- professionals would also be wise to recognize and identify the CMC channels through which media-induced as well as other travelers communicate, in order to more efficiently and effectively accommodate the needs of these traveling consumers.

The Travel Industry Association of America (TIA) (2005) estimates that the over 79 million Americans research their travel options online. Taking into consideration youths growing participation in travel and tourism industry; their escalating interest in study abroad programs and ‘gap-years’; the exploding development of online social networks and the continued efforts of mass media to create more involved audiences and consumers, far more research is needed to understand young travelers’ online information behavior.

This research has proven beneficial in several ways. First, it has proven useful in expanding our knowledge of youths’ participation in the travel and tourism industry, specifically within the market of media-induced tourism, for which very little empirical

data exists. Second, it provided a distinct opportunity to examine how young travelers' involvement with mass media (i.e. Internet and television programming), influences online information search behavior within travel and tourism. Industry professionals would be wise to recognize the ability of young travelers, specifically this unique 'millennial' population, to critically influence the travel decision-making process of family and friends. Insight into the travel-related behavior of this population provides a competitive advantage to proactive industry professionals into a virtually untapped, financially stable, increasingly mobile, and globally aware tourism market segment.

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