Hospitality Word of Mouth 3.0- the importance of Word of Video (WoV)

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ABSTRACT

Word of mouth has been a key part of every effective marketing strategy for hospitality businesses. With its intangible nature, hospitality finds it difficult to market its services. Past customer experiences are one of the best strategies that allows some quantification of the quality of the product. Social media and the growth of web 2.0 have enabled word of mouth to be shared amongst million of potential customers, one therefore can argue that electronic word of mouth (e-wom) has been the successor of the traditional word of mouth. However recent increase of m-commerce and the development of cheap and easy Smartphone technology suggests that the next stage of e-Wom is the use of video blogging as a method of sharing hospitality related experiences. The paper explores the thesis that word of video will be the natural evolution of e-wom in hospitality. It attempts to explore this by comparing responses to a text review of a restaurant versus a video review of the same restaurant. Participants of the experiment are invited to either comment on the text review or the video review and the results from the two samples are compared.

Early findings suggest that hospitality users find pictures more useful and trustworthy followed by text reviews. Video blogging comes only third in terms of trustworthiness and usefulness. The findings are also validated by qualitative comments left by LinkedIn users. Finally findings from this sample show a significance difference when it comes to hotel purchase intentions versus restaurant visit intentions, this finding may suggest that online reviews are less important for habitual purchases. The paper findings suggest implications for management who may chose to invest in platforms that facilitate the use of both ewom and wov as an integrated effort to the organisations marketing strategy.   The research is limited by the small sample size and future research could consider a more in depth qualitative approach that allows for better understanding of the consumer perceptions of both ewom and wov. Having said that this paper delivers an original approach to word of mouth in hospitality. The authors suggest that although word of video appears to be at its infancy in hospitality, the potential implications for consumer behaviour research, (both for analysing the creation of WoV content by hospitality consumers and the consumption of such content) are great.

Key Words: Word of Mouth (WOM), Word of Video (WOV), hospitality, social media, marketing, post-modern consumer

INTRODUCTION

The most notable invention of the 20th century is the Internet; intangible in nature yet holds an enormous amount of force behind it to bring millions of people together in yet

another platform of communication. There is no doubt that we are currently at a point in our evolution and history, where humanity as a whole has stopped progressing in a linear fashion; but progresses now in an exponentially accelerated rate, this is most visible in our technological development. That very communication consists of individuals imparting knowledge to one another. So the phenomenon of word of mouth (WOM) existed long before technology came in to play. Furthermore WOM was arguably a factor that shaped the decisions of humankind throughout history. Now through technological advancement WOM has evolved and found its most significant foothold online. Electronic WOM (eWOM) has the ability to reach thousands of people through the click of a mouse; however this paper aims to investigate the idea that video review is a viable future for WOM.

Video content is making its way into social network and user review sites, and is highly influential (Mintel, 2008). People can post commentary online and upload and share pictures, audio and video files with a large number of others (Dwivedi, Shibu and Venkatesh, 2007). Broadband becoming commonplace has made it possible for users to easily participate in video-sharing and streaming (Mintel, 2008). This paper seeks to attempt battling the mammoth task of filling the gap in research that exists in the area of Word of Video(WOV). The anonymity of online posting empowers consumers to express their views about a product or service with an unprecedented speed and ease (Gelb and Sudaram, 2002; cited in Pantelidis, 2009). Monitoring what consumers are saying about business offerings on the web is very time consuming and expensive, as much of this has to be done manually (Parker and Pfeiffer, 2005). This becomes even more difficult with video reviews, as currently video reviews are text reviews with external linked videos (Parker and Pfeiffer, 2005).

Arguably, technology we use today does not mirror the technological advancements mankind has taken up to this point of time. As Pantelidis (2009) mentions "technology such as voice activity detection already exists but it still has to find its application in software that utilise it in order to monitor audio and video". This paper seeks to pick up on Pantelidis's notion that WOM has evolved to WOV. Through finding evidence of its existence online for the hospitality industry, additionally investigating its acceptance of WOV in the consumer minds and evidence of usage for information search. We will first illustrate how WOM has evolved and touch on possible areas which may or may not help or hinder in the evolution of WOM through offering different perspectives to this subject and then illustrate and discuss the findings of the video and text review study.

Our sense of belonging of identification and how we centre ourselves in the world we live in is an important factor in understanding the human element behind communication. The post-modern hospitality consumer is highly fragmented in his consumer behaviour and with the perceived decline in fixed social roles; individuals are left to adopt a wide variety of identities in postmodern society (Williams, 2004). Cushman (1990) argues that "we are in an era of the "empty self" in which alienation and loss of community can be solved by the "lifestyle solutions in which the consumer constructs "a self" by purchasing.(Elliot, 1997). Hospitality has been playing a big role in offering consumers a playground for this search of identity, for example through themed tourist attractions and restaurants.

People create content to review positive and negative experiences and to share them with other likeminded people, others see it as a lifestyle choice in using their conspicuous consumption to create status in their "empty selves". According to Chris Anderson, contemporary western culture is shattered in nature into zillion different cultural shards, and

when mass culture breaks apart, it does not reform into a different mass but turns into micro-cultures (niche markets) which coexist and interact (Economist, 2006). The internet shows strong characteristics of fragmentation and in essence encourages this development of micro-cultures; with millions of discussion, news and special interest groups, it offers greater diversity of product and service than any High Street or Mall (Berthon, Pitt and Watson, 2000). The internet is a medium which enables the distribution of highly personalized and fragmented information, where a significant amount of the material is designed to reach only a single person, a handful of people or a group or less than 1000 people (Besser.H , 1995 cited in Berthon, Pitt and Watson, 2000). These electronic reviews have become an important phenomenon, with marketers trying to exploit their potential through viral marketing campaigns (De Bruyn and Lilien, 2008, cited in Longart, 2008). According to Mintel (2008) viral marketing and WOM are part of the complex process of purchase decision-making, and the wide availability of online research methods causes WOM to change in its form. Nowadays consumers routinely turn to online forums or customer reviews when contemplating a purchase, this goes hand in hand with using websites such as Trip Adviser or Facebook and Twitter(Mintel, 2008).

Hospitality venues have little leeway in altering what consumers say about a restaurant experience they however have the opportunity to alter what the consumer perceives. The idea of perception captures the notion of the importance of the appearance of the plate, and the food upon it. Restaurants are able to ensure that the first impression of restaurant facility, ambience, service and look of food is immaculate and thus does not allow disputability. As the post-modern consumer pays particular attention to creation of their "self" image, the food experience becomes an extension of this. Frequent foursquare updates of where one has "checked in" can be observed on Facebook/Twitter through mobile submissions. Immediate first and lasting impressions can be communicated through text and picture on Blogs but more commonly on Social Networks and micro-blogging websites. Video might be able to eradicate possible doubts of trust raised by text review online. As e-WOM is primarily anonymous, the reader is not aware of who has posted the text review, thus marketers have tendencies to flush the market with fake e-WOM that are made to be perceived as user generated content (UGC). Video is able to bring back the human element, thus demonstrate validity of content to the viewer.
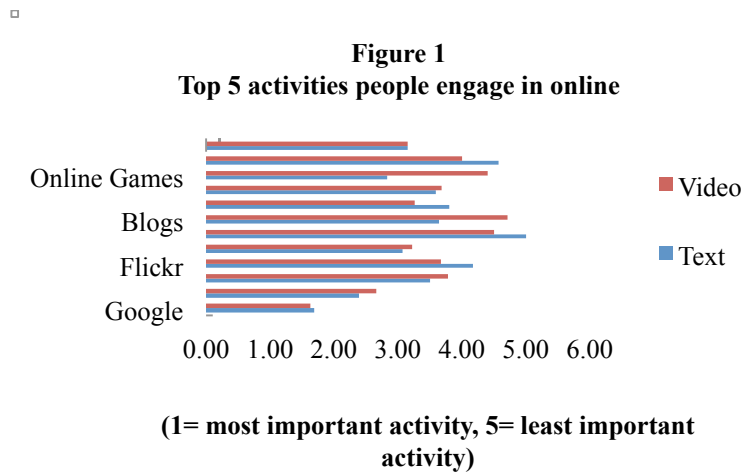
METHODOLOGY

The primary research was conducted online, for this purpose two separate websites were created. One website contained a text review (www.melanierogan.com/text) and the other a video review (www.melanierogan.com/video). Two surveys were created using Survey Monkey (www.surveymonkey.com) for each website. Two sample sizes of 100 No. different people were directed to take each survey. The first website asks the participants to view a video review of a restaurant, and then take a survey; the second website asks the participant to read through a text review which is identical to the video review and then take a survey. The text survey collected 48 No. responses, of which 40 No. were fully completed. The video survey collected 49 no. responses of which 40 no. were fully completed. Both surveys consist of 23 no. questions, and are primarily of pre-coded quantitative nature of which 3 have supplementary open quantitative questions. The aim has been to capture the general willingness to engage with video reviews, a bigger sample size was needed, which could have only been collected through quantitative research and accelerated through being online. Furthermore, pre-coding allows for numerical comparisons of people's opinions and

should identify particular trend. The restaurant used for this research was specifically chosen for its popularity. "Nopi" is the newest venture of Guardian Food Writer and chef Yotam Ottolenghi, who is well known in the London's foodie scene for his brassarie "Ottolenghi". Finally in order to validate results a single question was posted on the answers and questions section of the professional social platform Linkedin. Twenty one professionals answered the question giving some insight as to wether that particular demographic trusts text reviews more than video reviews.
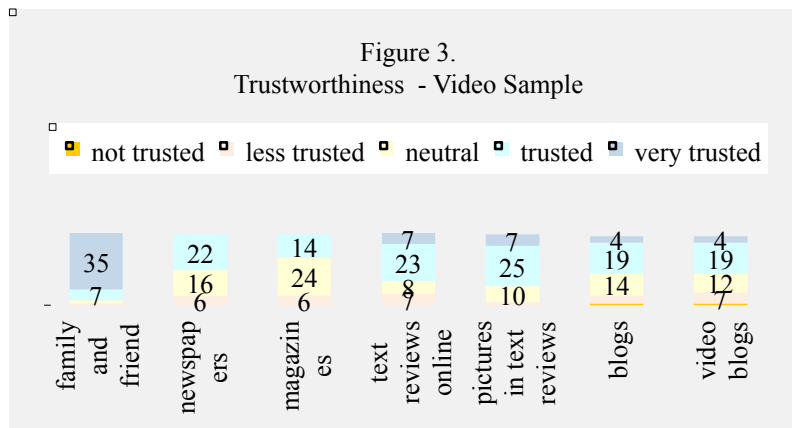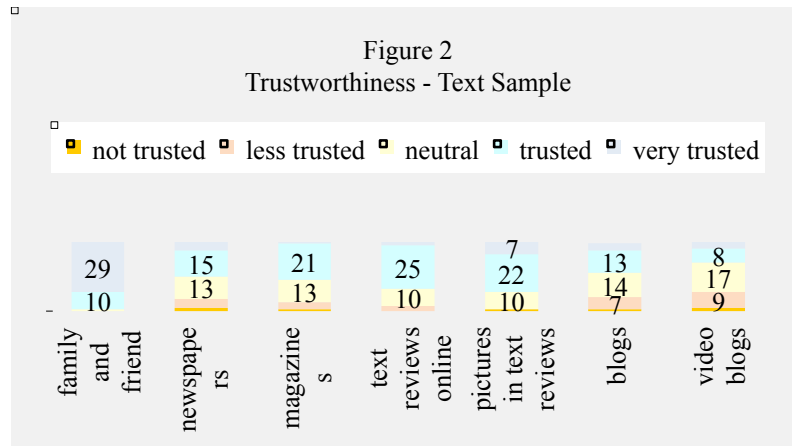
DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Understanding how post-modern consumers engage online is the first step of this research. In allowing a look into how consumers value the importance of e-WOM activities.

Figure 1
Top 5 activities people engage in online

(1= most important activity, 5= least important activity)

The survey evidence shows that review websites score a relative mediocre importance for most participants. Social media on the other hand such as Facebook are very important to the post-modern consumers. It is not surprising thus that social-media marketing is the hottest new edition in the marketing realm; which is a type of online post-modern tribe marketing. However when comparing the numbers more closely, the sample that was exposed to the video review was more in favour of e-WOM with answers above neutral. Nevertheless visual media does score highly for both of the survey samples. YouTube is clearly 3rd most important activity for both samples, with both 28-32/48-49 consumers engaging with consumer generated video content.

In regards to which media are most trustworthy to engage with online and offline WOM activities Figures 2. and 3. below illustrate the findings. Most notably family and friends score clearly as the most trustworthy of all WOM activity in both samples.

Figure 2
Trustworthiness - Text Sample

■ not trusted ■ less trusted ■ neutral ■ trusted ■ very trusted

	family and friend	newspapers	magazines	text reviews online	pictures in text reviews	blogs	video blogs
very trusted	29	15	21	25	7 22	13	8 17
	10	13	13	10	10	14 7	9

Figure 3.
Trustworthiness - Video Sample

■ not trusted ■ less trusted ■ neutral ■ trusted ■ very trusted

|	family and friend	newspapers	magazines	text reviews online	pictures in text reviews	blogs	video blogs
	35	22	14	7 23	7 25	4 19	4 19
	7	16 6	24 6	8 7	10	14	12 7

The second most trusted medium is pictures in text reviews online for both samples (video 32/49 and 29/48 text) stating they either find them trustworthy or very trustworthy. Text reviews show high results equal to the ones from picture reviews. However blogs and video blogs differ in their composition of responses. The sample that engaged with the video review prior to taking the survey clearly scored blogs and video blogs more trustworthy than the text sample. In particular video blogs have a difference of 12 participants in trustworthiness.

Figure 4.
Based on the review I have just watched/read I would visit this restaurant
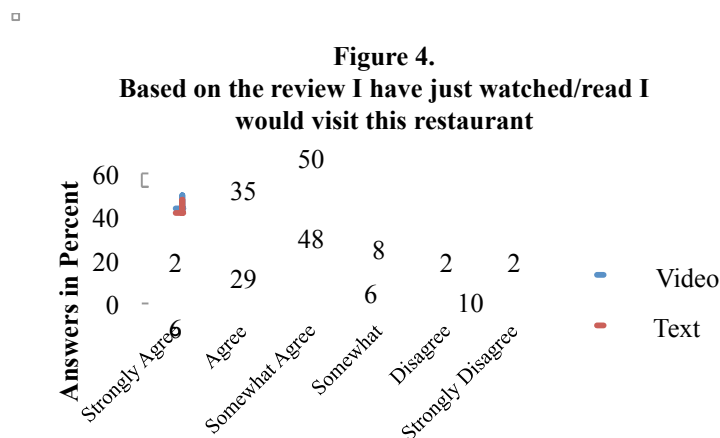
When comparing Figure 4. and 5. the results are rather surprising; there seem to be a contradiction on what the participants think video and text reviews would have for an impact on them. Clearly they may think that video reviews do not have an influence on them

however they do. Figure 4. illustrates video reviews are just as impressionable or even more than text reviews.

Figure 5.
Opinion on how trusted video/text reviews are
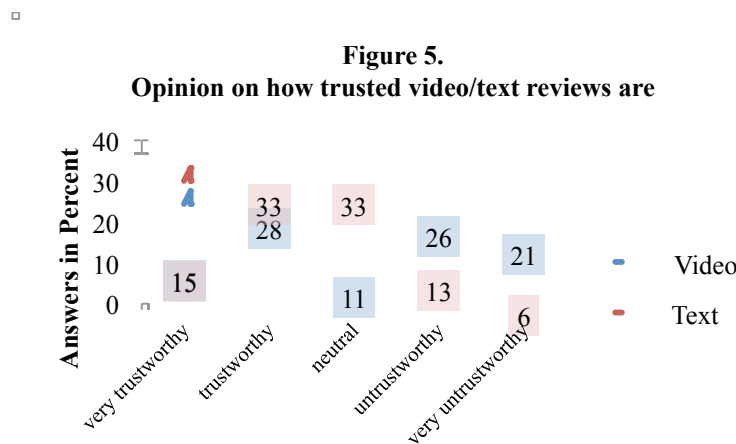
Three of these participants who reacted negatively to the video reviews from the video sample were questioned after the survey was taken, why they reacted particularly negatively to video reviews. Two out of these three participants pointed out that they could not be sure that those particular videos were truly user generated, as they might be viral advertising campaigns discussed as UCG. Interestingly enough both users are keen YouTube observers.

When searching online with the keywords "restaurant video reviews" on major search engines, the first two videos displayed at the top are low budget viral-media ads, with a focus on promoting the particular establishment they are reviewing. In particular the channels rawfood and Vanuatu.tv are networks with the sole purpose to promote restaurant venues. Further results from this search, revealed 3 links which are from a website called www.londonvideoreviews.co.uk, a website dedicated to promote their business to restaurants to create video reviews for promotional purposes. The last link "Hoggy's Restaurant Video Review" is seemingly a UCG video which through clearly raises suspicion to the question again, "is this a user generated video or another viral-marketing attempt". Unfortunately any reviews and comments were disabled in this review. In fact the entire first page of search results does not offer any clear user generated video reviews.

The difficulties in finding real UCG content for restaurant reviews online correlates with the answers from the both samples. When asked if they have engaged in writing either video or text reviews online both results were rather grim in regards to the video reviews uploaded by participants. The majority of both samples have not engaged in UCG creation in regards to video posts only 4 people out of 97 participants have ever posted a video online. On the other hand nearly 30% of the overall participants have posted text reviews online. This could lead to the assumption that online users are less likely to trust video content currently posted online. Firstly as the majority of search hits are either clearly created by agencies or firms directly and the UCG videos posted online are hard to distinguish of real or viral content. Arguably text reviews may seem more trustworthy to the post-modern consumer as it's a medium that they would more clearly engage in when it comes to creating text reviews.

The post-modern consumer is very savvy when it comes to mobile phones and the majority of respondents with nearly 58% do own a smartphone. Regardless of this only a miniscule amount actually actively takes pictures and posts them online. More than 70% of the respondents either strongly or somewhat disagree with posting pictures of their experiences online. Arguably this also shows a clear trend in general for how ready consumers are to post other media through mobile devises. The ones that agreed with the statement used PC's or Mac's to upload data. Those figures though however correlate with the ones collected for the Flickr use, presented in Figure 1.This arguably leads to the assumption that visual incentives while useful when paired with text reviews, and information search in general are very welcome for the user. The post-modern consumer does not truly engage in uploading.

The post-modern consumer, while receptive to elements of semiotics of picture and video does not clearly understand how much these have an effect on their perception towards their future decision making process. Although they clearly state they do not trust video over text at this point of time this experiment has shown that it is an equal contender to text reviews. Even though the majority of videos found online are related to online marketing campaigns and promotional material the information given by those promotion reviews does fill the information gap for those users who actively seek reviews online. A further indication of change is visible through the positive findings on the YouTube engagement of the participants. The question, however most puzzling is "where are all those thousands of enthusiastic YouTube users/video content creators who also enjoy the hospitality offering?" When conducting another keyword search on "restaurant reviews" this time on YouTube, the response yielded a result of 3,710 videos under this search. The videos found on YouTube for restaurant reviews are either slide show videos with commenary or videos with lacking visual and audio due to poor technology available to the reveiwers.

Coming back to the 3 interviews conducted with the video sample entries that did not favour video reviews, on the question "why they do not post on YouTube, even though they are keen viewers". Two simply spoke of disinterest and lack of time, whereas one responder clearly said they felt uncomfortable posting reviews online; most notably the hostile comments left by some immature viewers put them off totally from engaging in such a medium. Creating a video review can be more time consuming than a simple text review. However YouTube does offer features which enable user to mobile post almost instantly; however the quality of the video and sound may not be of the best and might put viewers off.

The observation findings of internet search have helped in shedding light onto why the participants of the surveys would trust text over video. Generally it is difficult to find authentic UGC video reviews online which do not raise the suspicion of viral-marketing; no one particular website could be pointed out that specifically hosts UGC video reviews for hospitality purposes, on the contrary there are plenty of text review websites that fill the spot. Taken from the survey results it does become apparent that the post-modern consumer at various points contradicts its own consumer behaviour. Take for instance the low ratings for trusting video reviews but high ratings for its usefulness to opinion creation and You Tube engagement. Clearly the post-modern consumer is affected by the visual element of reviews and enjoys engaging with it.

Attempting to further understand perceptions of consumers the question "*what do you trust more online restaurant text reviews or video reviews and why*" was posted on the professional networking site LinkedIn and the results justify the findings discussed earlier on

this paper. Out of 21 answering the question 16 professionals prefer text reviews with only 3 considering video to offer value. The general consensus for those who do not prefer WoV is that it takes more time to watch a video than read a short text and that because of the extra time it takes to create a video, the video creator is more likely to have a hidden agenda.

CONCLUSION

This paper was successful in presenting data that e-WOM currently is still in a transformation between text and video. Elements of WOV are already visible and expanding slowly but surely. The technology used to create WOV reviews is available, but significantly limited in its current use to consumers. The spectrum of creating video captions ranges from good quality videos which are highly time consuming to extremely low quality videos, through technology such as Quick Capture offered by YouTube(YouTube,2011). This paper was able to show that WOV is already part of our lives. However currently there is no one particularly trustworthy website available which incorporates UGC video reviews for hospitality venues, such as text review websites TripAdvisor or Yelp. Finding valid video review material online is rather difficult and requires time and dedication most post-modern consumers are not willing to part with. Findings exhibit text reviews to be more trusted but in usefulness video has the lead. This clearly shows that visual semiotics is of importance to the consumer. Moreover video reviews are not yet fully accepted by consumers, due to its newness and still very unyielding technological obstacles currently challenging this field. This highlights an area of significant barriers of entries which WOV has to overcome to manifest itself as the next generation of e-WOM.

The consumer while starting to adopt WOV to its information search currently is hindered by the very thing that spurs on the evolution- technology. Consumers themselves have taken technology in their own hands to advance these areas. Amateur developers, hackers and electronics enthusiasts from around the world have been turning Microsoft's Xbox 360 Kinect device to new purposes for instance 3D mapping(Warman,2010). One most interesting quality of Xbox 360 Kinetic is how effective it could be for learning gesture-based activities (Dotson, 2011); this type of gesture recognition could be used for video blogging in the near future if further developed that way. Microsoft's acquisition of Skype gives hope for new developments in this area. Microsoft Kinect, with the technological potential, and Skype with its 145 millions of followers (Bishop, 2011), could unleash a new video generation that more than welcomes activities such as WOV. Soon enough technology is bound to catch up on the WOM evolution; the post-modern consumer will more than likely adapt to the newest fashionable trends and we may see the rise of a brand new 'Xbox Video Blogging' generation – a new tribal sub-group of the WOM phenomenon. Stay tuned as you are connected to the future.

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