# Storytelling on Social Media: The Motives for Telling the Tourist Experience to the Connected Others

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**Abstract:** The development of the Internet and improvements in information and communication technologies (ICTs) allow consumers to share their opinions and experiences of products and services with other consumers through electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM, word-of-mouse) communication. The main aim of this study is to explore the motives underlying travellers' sharing their holiday experiences with their connected others. In this study, following a theoretical discussion based on a review of the relevant literature, the role and importance of sharing the tourist experience with connected others in social media is demonstrated based on the results of structured interviews (online and offline) with 38 people who were chosen based on their holiday experience sharing habits. The qualitative research in the form of interviews conducted with 38 people who were accustomed to widely sharing their travel experiences revealed that storytelling played a serious role in addition to the holiday experience itself, and sharing experiences with connected others was seen as a vital tool for a fulfilling holiday experience. Exploring reasons behind tourists' storytelling provide a better understanding of the tourist behaviour in social media, and the impact of eWOM on the tourist experience. The results demonstrate the contribution of storytelling to the tourist experience, and provide a basis for further research on scale development for assessing the impact of storytelling on the tourist experience.

**Keywords:** Social Media; Storytelling; New Tourist; Communication; Electronic WOM

## 1. Introduction

Tourism is one sector that has a very close relationship with the innovations in information technologies. Today, social media provide many opportunities for travellers to share their holiday experiences with their connected others. People share their opinions with connected others by sending e-mails, posting comments and feedback on websites and forums, publishing online blogs, and forming and joining communities on the Internet. Sharing their experiences with others contributes to the value of the experience and makes it more meaningful and memorable. For new

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tourists, storytelling plays a serious role in addition to the holiday experience itself, and sharing experiences with connected others is seen as a vital tool for a fulfilling holiday experience.

Due to the proliferation of the Internet and the wide distribution of networked computers and digital social networks that create a basis for interaction, any person can make his thoughts and views accessible to all users of the Internet. Millions of Internet users interact through online social networks, exchanging information and sharing their opinions with others (Dellarocas, 2003; Thorson & Rodgers, 2006). The relationships in today's society that are recognised to exist in networks of family, friends, professional colleagues, and other community members are created mostly online (Müller, 1999; Pigg & Crank, 2004; Rheingold, 2000).

In today's society, the power of connecting people writing about products and services on blogs, sharing their opinions on a specific subject or talking about brands and experiences on Twitter and Facebook has been rising (Li & Bernoff, 2008, 2009).

The development of information and communication technologies, primarily the Internet, has enriched the consumer's communication environment (Vilpponen, Winter & Sundqvist, 2006) and brought about new forms of electronic peer-to-peer communication (De Bruyn & Lilien, 2004). Ahuja and Carley (1999) describe this new enriched environment as "an amorphous web of connections". In particular, the development of social network platforms on the Internet has facilitated social interconnections (Tussyadiah, Rozakausar, & Soesilo, 2015) and individuals have been provided with a medium to share information and opinions with other people more easily than ever before (Hennig-Thurau, Gwinner, Walsh, & Gremler, 2004).

The Internet has brought drastic changes in the field of communications (Dellarocas, 2003; Kozinets, 2002) and computer-mediated communication has become very important in information search and the experience sharing process. Empowered with computer-mediated communication, individuals and online communities have the power to shape culture, community opinion, and consumer preferences.

The new tourism consumers supported by the information and communication technologies are more informed, more independent, more individualistic, and more involved; they also tell stories about their experiences to other people. In fact, people like hearing and telling stories.

The main aim of this research is to determine why tourists share travel experiences with their connected others and to demonstrate the role and importance of sharing that experience with connected others in social media.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. Social Networks

The advent of the Internet has revolutionised communication by offering a very similar medium to word-of-mouth communication and increasing numbers of people have begun writing about and sharing their experiences online. Broadband connections combined with user-generated media- blogs, podcasts, videos and other free and readily available tools - offer people the opportunity to have a voice with the help of Web 2.0 social media to shape public perceptions of products and services (McConnell & Huba, 2007).

The arrival of Web 2.0 technology allowed the development of a unique platform, social media, for communication and information exchange (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Saperstein & Hastings, 2010; Wigmo & Wikström, 2010). While Web 1.0, as the first stage of development of the World Wide Web was known, did not provide a medium for interactive and user-generated content, Web 2.0 or social media allows users to share their ideas and opinions easily and interactively. Social media have many different forms such as wikis, blogs, microblogs (Twitter), social networking sites (Facebook), media-sharing sites (YouTube, Flickr), consumer review sites (TripAdvisor), and voting sites (Fischer & Reuber, 2011).

Social capital is defined as "an instantiated informal norm that promotes cooperation between two or more individuals" (Fukuyama, 2001, p. 7). Social capital functions to decrease the transaction costs associated with formal coordination mechanisms like contracts, hierarchies, bureaucratic rules, etc. (Fukuyama, 2001, p. 10). Social capital is often seen as a function of network qualities, norms of reciprocity and trust (Pigg & Crank, 2004, p. 60). Social networks comprise social capital that facilitates collective action (Wall, Ferazzi, & Schryer, 1998; Woolcock, 2001). Annen (2003) suggests that networks that facilitate information exchange among people based on relationships direct people towards cooperative behaviour. Certain qualities of social networks such as diversity and extensiveness are related to social capital (Flora, 1998). The network focus existing in studies on social capital, in which all uses refer to more or less dense interconnecting networks of relationships between individuals

and groups, attracts the attention of ICT (information and communication technologies) researchers to the subject due to the parallel nature of social networks (Pigg & Crank, 2004; Portes, 1998; Putnam, 1993; Woolcock, 1998). The relationships in modern society, existing in networks of family, friends, professional colleagues, and other community members are created mostly online (Müller, 1999; Pigg & Crank, 2004; Rheingold, 2000).

The impact of the World Wide Web powered by Web 2.0 together with e-mail facilitates information dissemination and searching (Stromer-Galley, 2003; Williams & Trammell, 2005). Interactivity as an essence of web-based communication provides Internet users with the opportunity to control their access through the use of hyperlinks, to contribute to a site, and to go beyond passive exposure (Williams & Trammell, 2005). As suggested by the social information processing theory, social networks provide information to individuals and cues for behaviour and action (Tinson & Ensor, 2001). Sharing information and experiences through online social networks is regarded as an increasingly important factor affecting the acceptance and use of products and services.

## 2.2. Electronic Word-of-Mouth

The dissemination of the Internet allows consumers to share their opinions of and experiences with products and services with other consumers through electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM). This type of communication is regarded as similar to word-of-mouth (WOM) and is called word-of- mouse or online word-of-mouth communication that empowers consumers. People share their opinions with connected others by sending e-mails, posting comments and feedback to websites and forums, publishing online blogs, and forming and joining communities on the Internet.

Broadband connections combined with user-generated media - blogs, podcasts, videos and other free and readily available tools - offer consumers the opportunity to have a voice with the help of Web 2.0 social media to shape public perceptions of products and services (McConnell & Huba, 2007). Individuals and online communities who share their opinions and experiences online have the power to shape culture and consumer preferences.

Word-of-mouth (WOM) communication refers to interpersonal communication among consumers concerning their personal experiences with a firm or product (Richins, 1983). While prior research on word-of-mouth communication has mainly concentrated on interpersonal (or face-to-face) interaction (Anderson, 1998; Bearden

& Etzel, 1982; Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955; Rogers, 1983), the advent of the Internet has brought drastic changes in the field of communication and computer-mediated communication has become very important in information search and decision-making processes (Dellarocas, 2003; Kozinets, 2002).

People can not only be persuaded by advertisers, the people (family members, acquaintances, and even strangers) they come into contact with and talk to every day are considered as noteworthy and influential sources of opinion and information about products, services, brands, and voter choice (Thorson & Rodgers, 2006).

Electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) gives customers both social and economic value and therefore individuals may have different motivations in using or generating eWOM (Balasubramanian & Mahajan, 2001; Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004). Eight different motivations for online information and opinion seeking before purchasing a product or a service have been identified, namely: reducing risk, imitating behaviours of others, obtaining lower prices, accessing easy information, accidental/unplanned, because it is cool, stimulation by offline inputs such as TV, and getting prepurchase information (Cheong & Morrison, 2008; Goldsmith & Horowitz, 2006).

Social media enable individuals to interact with other people all around the world based on their interests. Recent developments in information and communication technologies allow consumers of tourism, which is a highly information-intensive industry (Benckendorff, Sheldon, & Fesenmaier, 2014), to produce and share information. Maser and Weiermair (1998, p. 107) suggest that "information can be treated as one of the most or even the most important factor influencing and determining consumer behaviour." Social media, a group of Internet-based communication-based applications supplied by the Web 2.0 platform, provide Internet users with a valuable tool to interact and communicate with others (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). The development of Web 2.0 technologies has allowed tourists to share their travel-related experiences, their knowledge and observations through social media (Munar & Jacobsen, 2014).

## 2.3. Storytelling

In every culture, in the past and today, stories created with shared information have played critical roles in constituting meaning, constructing identity, and prescribing behaviour (Godsil & Goodale, 2013, p. 2). The human brain serves a social purpose to connect individuals in the society through interwoven stories, or narratives, through which individuals try to explain the world to others (Godsil & Goodale,

2013).

According to Bruner (1986), there exist two modes of thought that individuals use in interpreting and understanding the world and their experiences: the paradigmatic mode and the narrative mode. While the paradigmatic mode, or the logico-scientific version, attempts to provide a formal, mathematical system of description and explanation and is concerned with logically categorising the world, the narrative mode is concerned with the meaning attributed to experiences through stories (Adler, 2008).

The desire and need to share information and experiences with others in a virtual environment stimulate the continuity of a virtual society (Reychav & Weisberg, 2009; Zhang & Sundaresan, 2010). The participation of tourists in social media is attributed to functional, social, psychological and hedonic benefits (Wang & Fesenmaier, 2004), and monetary benefits (Gwinner, Gremler & Bitner, 1998; Lee, Ahn & Kim, 2008).

Electronic word-of-mouth from social media has an impact on the travel planning process of tourism consumers (Pan, MacLaurin & Crotts, 2007). The social media used in the three phases of the traveller's travel planning process including pre-trip, during-trip and post-trip have been topics of research related to tourism consumer behaviour. This study attempts to investigate the role of social media in the pre-trip processes of travel panning as a tool for knowledge sharing. Therefore, it is important to understand the reasons behind the information and experience sharing desire of tourists to achieve a better understanding of social media as communication platforms.

Since user-generated content (UGC) such as peer reviews is considered similar to suggestions provided by family members, friends or people sharing similar thoughts and interests (Wang, Yu & Fesenmaier, 2002; Yoo, Lee, Gretzel & Fesenmaier, 2009), it is an important information source in planning travel (Chung & Buhalis, 2008). People find information provided by their connected others more reliable when compared to information provided by tourism suppliers (Fotis, Buhalis & Rossides, 2012; Yoo et al., 2009; Zeng & Gerritsen, 2014).

The perceived credibility of UGC determines its influence on tourists' decisions and this credibility is influenced by the reputation of the UGC writer based on previous experiences, the person's experience in travelling, and experience in the ICTs or social media platforms usage (Zeng & Gerritsen 2014).

## 3. Research

In order to demonstrate the role and importance of sharing the tourist experience with connected others in social media, qualitative research in the form of interviews was conducted with 38 people who were accustomed to widely sharing their travel experiences. By conducting structured interviews (online and offline) with people who were chosen based on their holiday experience sharing habits, the contribution and place of storytelling in a tourism consumer's holiday experience were explored. Interviews were conducted face-to-face and via e-mail. The interviews were conducted in March, 2016. The interviews lasted between 25 and 30 minutes.

This study was designed (1) to determine reasons behind tourists sharing travel experiences with their connected others, and (2) to demonstrate the role and importance of sharing the tourist experience with connected others in social media.

Among the 38 respondents, 18 were male and 20 were female. All of the respondents stated that they were actively using social media and sharing their travel experiences with their connected others. The respondents were adults between 24 and 55 years old and all of them had bachelor's or graduate degrees. They were accustomed to travelling frequently (both for leisure and business) and were users of social media platforms.

The questions asked of the interviewees and their answers can be summarised as follows:

***Question 1.*** *Why do you share your travel experiences and information on your travel with your connected others?*

Based on the answers of interviewees, the reasons behind sharing travel experiences and information are given in Table 1.

Almost all of the respondents suggested that the experiences became more real when shared with others. Many of them claimed that they referred to memories (experiences, check-in, photographs and videos, and other things shared with connected others) to revive the experiences, and to feel the good moments again. 25 of the interviewees commented that in modern times sharing the moments had become more important than living the moments. Nearly half of the respondents said that if they had not shared their experiences with their connected others, the people in their social networks might have thought that they were asocial and they had never

gone anywhere. 16 of the respondents claimed that their travel experience seemed to lack meaning and fulfilment when not shared with others.

**Table 1. Reasons for sharing travel experiences and information**

| Reasons | Number of Respondents |
|---|---|
| Adaptation to social group | 30 |
| Gaining respect and recognition | 28 |
| Recording the moments lived | 27 |
| Encouraging loved ones to visit the places travelled | 26 |
| Suggestions and providing information | 26 |
| Claiming that "I was there." | 22 |
| Snobbism | 20 |
| Nostalgia | 19 |
| Collecting memories | 18 |
| Feeling important | 18 |
| Determining trends | 18 |
| Reviving experiences/memories | 16 |
| Proof of experiences lived | 15 |
| Desire for superiority | 14 |
| Drawing attention | 12 |
| Considering travel experience as a success and desire of showing success | 12 |

***Question 2.*** *According to you, what can be reasons behind your connected others sharing their travel experiences and travel-related information?*

According to respondents, the reasons behind their connected others sharing their travel-related experiences are shown in Table 2.

An interesting observation was made during the interviews: While individuals suggested more acceptable and noble reasons to explain their own travel-related information and experience sharing with their connected others, they perceived that some of their connected others had less reasonable reasons to share their travel-related experiences, such as snobbism, earning money, desire of drawing attention or being abroad for the first time.

**Table 2. Reasons for the connected others sharing travel experiences and information**

| Reasons | Number of Respondents |
|---|---|
| claiming that "I was there" | 29 |
| drawing attention | 28 |
| gaining status | 25 |
| adaptation to social group | 24 |
| need to be liked | 23 |
| affecting other people | 21 |
| snobbism | 19 |
| striving to affect important people such as bosses, managers | 17 |
| helping others | 12 |
| being abroad for the first time | 12 |
| safety (by informing others about the current location and situation) | 9 |
| earning money | 8 |

*Question 3. Do you think that travellers sharing travel-related information and experiences provide benefits to their connected others?*

All of the respondents answered this question positively. According to them, information shared by peers was more reliable and helpful in planning their travels. In the respondents' opinions, sharing good or bad experiences provided many benefits before and during the travels of others. They all supposed that content shared by an experienced traveller would be more helpful when compared to the sharing of first time or inexperienced travellers.

*Question 4. Have you ever referred to user-generated content while you have planned your trip?*

All of the respondents admitted that they benefited from user-generated content while they were planning their travels. They added that they looked for information and experiences shared by more reliable sources –users known as reliable based on travel experiences and previous sharing.

## 4. Conclusions

The relationship between tourism and information and communication technologies and primarily social media has long been a topic of interest in research. While in the beginning research on the social media and tourism relationship focused on the impacts of social media on the tourism business from different aspects such as tourism demand, supply and marketing, studies on tourism consumer behaviour have

mainly analysed the role and use of social media in travel information searching and travel planning. Consumer studies have focused on the travel planning phase and information search behaviour of tourists. The motivations and reasons behind sharing tourism experiences through social media have gained the attention of researchers recently. Social networking sites allow tourism consumers to produce and share their tourism experiences.

Based on the results of the research, the motives for sharing the tourist experience were identified as adapting to social group, gaining respect and recognition, providing information, making the experiences more real, reviving the experiences, proving the experiences lived, feeling important, determining trends, drawing attention, and showing success. The respondents suggested that the experiences became more real when shared with others. According to the interviewees, in modern times sharing the moments has become more important than living the moments. The respondents claimed that their travel experience seemed to lack meaning and fulfilment when not shared with others.

During the interviews the respondents' perceptions of their connected others' travel-related information and experience sharing was explored. It was observed that the respondents perceived that some of their connected others had less reasonable reasons to share their travel-related experiences, such as snobbism, earning money, desire of drawing attention or being abroad for the first time.

The respondents suggested that sharing travel-related information and experiences provided benefits to their connected others, since information shared by peers was more reliable and helpful in planning their travels. In the respondents' opinions, content shared by an experienced traveller would be more helpful when compared to the sharing of first time or inexperienced travellers.

Understanding the motivations and reasons for using social media as a medium for storytelling, and examining the narratives of tourists could provide a better understanding of tourist behaviour that might give valuable information to tourism researchers, marketers, and suppliers. The motivations for sharing experiences through social media may vary based on cultural differences, nationalities, familiarity with social media platforms, the use and adoption of technology, and individual personalities and perceptions.

## 6. Limitations of the Study and Further Research

The findings of this qualitative research could only provide limited information on motivations and reasons for storytelling in social media, since the generalizability of the findings could be suggested as the limitation of this qualitative research due to its small sample size. This qualitative research was conducted as a starting point for a further quantitative study to determine Turkish travellers' motivations for sharing travel information and experiences and their social media usage habits before and during travel. Respondents' answers provided some hints on motivations and reasons for information and experience sharing through social media and usage of user-generated content. In addition to determining self-centred and community-related motivations for sharing experiences, the future study should cover "perception of others' experience sharing" to get some clues on how individuals perceive and use user-generated content in tourism.

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