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An Analysis of Empirical Research of Social Media and User-Generated Content in the Hospitality Industry

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AN ANALYSIS OF EMPIRICAL RESEARCH OF SOCIAL MEDIA AND USER-GENERATED CONTENT IN HOSPITALITY AND TOURISM

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A professional paper submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Science in Hotel Administration William F. Harrah College of Hotel Administration

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ABSTRACT

Hospitality remains highly competitive industry where establishments are always pushing new efforts to positively attract and retain consumers more so than the others. In recent years, the most significant trend in reaching to consumers is through social media. The research dives into great detail in the interactions and cause and effect between consumers and hospitality in social media such as the effect of user generated content. The research produces more details and ideas than simply engaging in social media helps hospitality establishments. The information was attained from a large content analysis of previous research, studies, surveys, experiments, statistical and quantitative analysis from the leading journals in hospitality as well as papers from psychology and marketing journals. The overall result concluded that simple promotion on social media is not the leading positive impactful factor; it is actually consumer engagement between the consumer and the brand or establishment that drives attention, consumers and advocates through social media. Those in hospitality will then be able to use the tools and strategies provided in the study based on data and research to further engage consumers and drive revenue to their establishment or brand.
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Part One

Introduction

In the 1990s when the internet and websites were starting to become widely used, especially as a sales platform, many in the hotel industry did not believe that it would become a main outlet for sales and a source of information. A few companies, known as online travel agencies, such as Priceline, became pioneers for hotel sales and information. Major hoteliers and other companies well established in tourism failed to foresee the trend of online as the main source for tourism information, reviews and bookings, leaving them behind while online travel agencies soon overtook market share of travel bookings and a source for information (Inversini & Masiero, 2014). Within this past five years, the trend has been moving quickly towards social media networks and user generated content sites as the primary source for tourism information and even travel bookings or referrals. For example, Facebook has seen over a 60% increase (from 1.3% in 2013 to 2.1% in 2014) for sources of direct revenue from bookings (Soler, 2014). Although this still represents a small percentage compared to other sources for direct revenue, social media and user-generated content are the primary source for hoteliers and tourism to more than simply promote and sell, but to interact and develop a relationship, following and eventually loyalty with consumers.

Consumers are finding information increasingly primarily about products and services via their social platforms, networks and directly from websites. Traditional marketing techniques remain influential and important, however social media will soon take a significantly share away becoming as influential if not even more so than the traditional marketing platforms (Cabiddu, De Carlo, & Piccoli, 2014). Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Flickr, YouTube, Pinterest, TripAdvisor, Yelp and other social media and user-generated content sites with billions of users and over
multiple platforms can reach either a limitless or very targeted consumer network and keep them informed, updated and even link them to direct bookings to the website of the hotel. Social media and online platforms are the modern equivalent of word-of-mouth, but on steroids. Instead of consumers directly reaching a dozen or so immediate friends and family through word-of-mouth, consumers using social media reach out to hundreds or more of their online friends and followers, which their post about the specified hotel can be re-shared and re-posted reaching out to an unlimited network of potential customers (Cabiddu et al., 2014).

**Purpose**

The purpose of this paper is to investigate the current literature on the trends, hoteliers’ usage and consumer reactions of social media and user-generated content within hospitality. Studies have previously linked social media messages on Facebook, social media in online travel information, but not necessarily document the current literature of social media in hospitality. This study focuses attention on empirical research and cases would have significant understanding of social media industry.

**Problem Statement**

This study will address the question: the importance and strategies for hoteliers’ use in social media networks and user-generated content sites are most positively effective for consumers’ interest and interaction.

**Justification**

Although currently social media platforms only make up a small share of direct revenue from online bookings, they are a leading source of information for consumers, which increases brand value. Brand value is extremely important especially for a long lasting image and business (Dijkman, Kerkhof, & Beukeboom, 2014). In the hospitality industry, consumers’ opinions are of
upmost importance. The travel experience shared widely online via photos, reviews, videos, or messages by consumers greatly affect the brand image and information available about the hotel or other tourism establishment. Therefore, social media and online platforms proves much more than just a measure of additional direct revenue but also brand value which influences the bottom line of hotels. The study will have a masterful combination of paramount important research and demonstrates the critically reviews in the literature.

**Limitation**

This study will have several limitations due to lack of keywords being searched and limited hospitality research domain. The design of the research of literature will only focused on top seven journals (Journal of travel research, International journal of hospitality management, Tourism management, International journal of contemporary hospitality management, Cornell hospitality quarterly, Journal of hospitality tourism research, Annals of tourism research) in the hospitality industry.
Part Two

Introduction

Buhalis (2003) argues that the advent of the internet and the development of the Web 2.0 social media environment has introduced unprecedented challenges and opportunities for the hospitality and tourism industries. With these technological advancements, it has become increasingly easy for consumers to share their opinions and experiences through widely-used social media networks such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, and review-based travel sites, such as TripAdvisor, or many hotel booking websites. This has resulted in a shift in the paradigm of power in the tourism industry, putting the customer in a position of power – indeed, recent studies show that positive consumer ratings in social media demonstrate a positive correlation with sales, granting social media a level of importance in clients’ decisions that is “quite clear” (Gidumal, Melián-González, & Lopez-Valcarcel, 2013).

In fact, it can be said that Information Communication Technology (ICT) developments have “revolutionized” the hotel industry (Inversini & Masiero, 2014), with the successful running of a website (Baloglu & Pekcan, 2006), and intelligent management of social media and internet distribution channels becoming a “pre-requisite for success” (O’Connor, 2010). Whilst attempts have been made to collate the wealth of research on ICT developments and the hospitality industry – and these attempts have included some analysis of the role of social media and user-generated content – a comprehensive examination of the roles of these developments in the industry could be beneficial to consumers and businesses alike (Law, Buhalis, & Cobanoglu, 2014). Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to provide an overview and analysis of current literature on the subject of the role of social media and online user-generated content (UGC) in the hospitality and tourism domain, and how these forms of feedback can affect/influence consumer opinions.
This study analyzed 36 social media and UGC-related research journals that were published between 2010 to 2015 in seven top hospitality journals. Those articles are listed in Appendix. These journals included:

- Journal of travel research (JTR);
- International journal of hospitality management (IJHM);
- Tourism management (TM);
- International journal of contemporary hospitality management (IJCHM);
- Cornell hospitality quarterly (CQ);
- Journal of hospitality tourism research (JHTR);

These seven research journals were using for analysis because they were perceived as the top hospitality journals in a global study reported by McKercher et al. (2006). These articles were reviewed using content analysis. Table I demonstrates the distribution of articles in each journal.

Table 1
Social Media and UGC-Related Publications

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of journal</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Journal of Travel Research</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International Journal of Hospitality Management</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tourism Management</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cornell Hospitality Quarterly</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journal of Hospitality Tourism Research</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annals of Tourism Research</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Social media

Social media is now the most common way for consumers to share ideas, content, thoughts, and relationships online. It can be defined as “a group of internet-based applications which build
on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0 and which allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content” (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Social media differs from so-called ‘mainstream media’ because anyone can create, comment on, and add to social media content, meaning that the presentation of ideas, opinions and advertisements is no longer the sole territory of companies and corporations, but something in which any individual can participate. Users are able to create, edit, access, and link to content and other consumers (Cabiddu et al., 2014).
Table 2
*Social Media Research 2010-2014*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Reference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>Zheng Xiang, Ulrike Gretzel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>Maria Mansson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>Woojin Lee, Lina Xiong, Clark Hu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>B. Bynum Boley, Vincent P. Magnini, Tracy L. Tuten</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>Julian K. Ayeh, Norman Au, Rob Law</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>Juan M. Madera</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>Rohit Verma, Debra Stock, Laura McCarthy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>Alan Wilson, Hilary Murphy, Jesus Cambra Fierro</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>Corne Dijkmans, Peter Kerkhof, Camiel J. Beukeboom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>Julian K. Ayeh, Norman Au, Rob Law</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>Stuart E. Levy, Wenjing Duan, Soyoung Boo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>Linchi Kwok, Bek Yu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>Santiago Melian-Gonzalez, Jacques Bulchand-Gidumal, Beatriz Lopez-Valcarcel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>Tomas Escobar-Rodriguez, Elena Carvajal-Trujillo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>Ana Maria Munar, Jens Kr. Steen Jacobsen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>Qiuju Luo, Dixi Zhong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>Jacques Bulchand-Gidumal, Santiago Melian-Gonzalez, Beatriz Gonzalez Lopez-Valcarcel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>Alessandro Inversini, Lorenzo Masiero</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>Francesca Cabiddu, Manuela De Carlo, Gabriele Piccoli</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>Ashley Schroeder, Lori Pennington-Gray</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>Suzanne Amaro, Paulo Duarte</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Social media has significantly altered the ways in which people communicate with one another and with companies, making the business-client relationship much more active and almost eliminating the need for any third party, in turn decreasing the effectiveness of traditional forms of commercial communication (Dijkmans et al., 2014). This trend is reflected statistically, as less than half of internet consumers interviewed in a survey of 28,000 people reported that they trust traditional advertising platforms, whilst 92% trust actual word-of-mouth and 70% trust online consumer reviews (Nielsen, 2012). The “democratization of information” prevalent in social media can function to increase consumer loyalty, improve customer experience, and establish and maintain higher service standards for patrons and higher prices for the benefit of businesses (Neti, 2011). Like ‘mainstream media’, social media is a multi-platform phenomenon and can take the
form of text, audio, video images, and communities (Scott, 2010). Some examples of social media are blogs, wikis, RSS feeds, electronic social networks, user generated content and location based Apps such as foursquare or Facebook ‘check-in’ (Cabiddu et al., 2014). Examples of social media that have been demonstrated and analyzed and the related references are listed in Table 2.

User-Generated Content

User-generated content (UGC) is an umbrella-term for the online comments, profiles, and photographs produced by consumers, particularly travelers, most often for travel-specific websites and the social media communities described above. UGC is “a mixture of fact and opinion, impression and sentiment, founded and unfounded tidbits, experiences and even rumor” (Blackshaw & Nazzaro, 2006) and (Wilson, Murphy, & Fierro, 2012), but studies show that prospective customers are willing to base their consumer decisions on the recommendations of such content. In fact, positive reviews will not only make a prospective consumer more likely to book, but customers believe that following the advice of reviews will reduce the chance of experiencing ‘buyer’s remorse’, and are also willing to pay a premium for a room with better reviews, under the understanding that its value is inherently higher (Tanford & Montgomery, 2014). Table 3 lists UGC research references from the bibliography.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Reference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>Weilin Lu, Svetlana Stepchenkova</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>Julian K. Ayeh, Norman Au, Rob Law</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>Alan Wilson, Hilary Murphy, Jesus Cambra Fierro</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>Philippe Duverger</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>Julian K. Ayeh, Norman Au, Rob Law</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>Ana Maria Munar, Jens Kr. Steen Jacobsen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>Breffini M. Noone, Kelly A. McGuire</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Importance of Social Media and UGC in the Hospitality and Tourism Industries
**Popularity.** Research has demonstrated that over half of all travelers’ hotel purchase decisions are influenced by travel reviews from other consumers, a figure representing more than $10 billion in online travel (Vermeulen & Seegers, 2009). In the past few years, figures demonstrate a shift from traditional guidebooks to online research, with eMarketer discovering that more than 60 percent of internet users in the United States choose to research their travel plans online (eMarketer, 2012), possibly due to the ease of access to real-life experiences of fellow travelers. The shift in reliance on UGC is also demonstrated in TripAdvisor’s online traffic records, with more than 200 million unique monthly visitors, 100 million reviews and opinions for 2.5 million different hospitality establishments, including hotels, resorts, bars, restaurants, trips and attractions. The link to Social Media becomes more explicit when one considers that through advertising, Facebook referred more than 15.2 million visitors to various tourism websites in 2010 alone (PhoCusWright, 2011).

**Influence.** Further research has shown that 70% of internet users claim to trust the opinions of fellow consumers that they see online, whether real or not (Nielsen, 2009). The status of social media and UGC as user-generated products from real, relatable people challenges traditional marketing channels by being ‘by tourists, for tourists’. Schmallegger and Carson (2008) report that “social media are seen as trustworthy in terms of the information which they impart” (p.101) which may not always be the case for so-called ‘mainstream’ forms of media. It can be said that social media is the modern version of ‘word of mouth’ and tourists respond to it as a form of destination marketing.

As such, a shift in control has been triggered wherein traditional media agencies and outlets are no longer the primary producers within the tourist space, causing a form of convergence based on consumer influence to a kind of ‘mediatized tourism’. This convergence is represented in the
“increased interdependence of communications systems”, wherein traditional boundaries between the production and consumption of media are blurred by the customer’s participation in both processes (Jenkins, 2006).

The hospitality and tourism industries are particularly well-adapted for such convergence, as they are naturally intertextual and destination-based product placement occurs almost organically in popular culture, particularly in movies such as *The Da Vinci Code* (which partook in a joint venture campaign with VisitScotland, VisitBritain, and Maison De La France), *or The Beach*, which directly and exponentially increased tourist numbers to its filming location at Koh Phi Phi, Thailand. An example of a company or organization combining these two spheres of influence to their advantage can be seen in Visit Australia’s promotion of real tourists’ stories on their Facebook page (Visit Australia, 2010).

An important reason for these successes lies in the status of social media and UGC as modern-day forms of ‘word of mouth’ (WOM). Historically, WOM has been considered one of the most credible forms of communication because it is seen as having passed through the unbiased, relatable filter of the everyday person, rather than having been formulated by a marketer looking to make a profit (Allsop, Bassett, & Hoskins, 2007). In an era when trust in institutions is in decline and the number of channels of informal communication is ever-increasing (with email, blogs, text messaging, instant messaging, cell phones, and many other examples being technology-based), the status of ‘word of mouth’ as a credible form of communication is only on the rise (Allsop et al., 2007). In fact, the importance of technological advancement in this territory has resulted in the coining of the phrase “e-word of mouth” (EWOM) to represent these forms of communication, of WOM developed using the possibilities the internet offers (Dellarocas, 2003; Hennig-Thurau, Gwinner, Walsh, & Gremler, 2004), which wield power due to their anonymous nature and wide
range of potential contents (Doh & Hwang, 2009). There are several ways that consumers give feedback: narrative, visual, or audio (Munar, 2011) and Xiang and Gretzel (2010) identify five clusters of UGC.

**The Five Clusters of User-Generated Content (UGC)**

User-Generated Content can be loosely divided into five clusters; review sites, photo and video sharing platforms, social networks, specific website/travel communities and blogs (Wilson et al., 2012). The first category is review sites, which focus solely on the contribution of reviews from users. Most often they give business managers the opportunity to ‘manage’ their page and respond to customer feedback, too. Sometimes additional services are offered (such as hotel booking, etc.) but usually through a partner site or by re-directing to the relevant channels.

Examples of review sites include TripAdvisor, Yelp, BookingBuddy and Online Travel Agencies (OTAs) where users can post reviews (TripAdvisor, 2010). The next category is photo and video sharing channels. The primary purpose of these sites and apps is to share media in the form of photographs and videos, but these can become consumer feedback tools or clever marketing tools when used correctly. The option to add locations can direct traffic to your resort, establishment, or destination, and the addition of tags or hashtags to make photos and videos searchable by interest widens a post’s potential audience substantially. Crucially, these forms of media are often used to present good experiences and inspire similar desires or even jealousy in the post’s audience. The most popular examples of photo and video sharing channels are YouTube, Instagram, Flickr, etc. (Wilson et al., 2012). The following category is social networks. Sites like Facebook and Twitter tend to include a number of features to allow for the sharing of experiences – they allow you to upload photos and videos, as well as sharing your written thoughts with individuals or with all of your Facebook friends or Twitter followers. The potential reach of
Facebook and especially Twitter (with the use of hashtags and trending topics) are substantially larger than most other forms of social media which can be a significant audience for consumers interested in traveling (Kasavana, Nusair, & Teodosic, 2010). Another category is direct and specific websites/travel communities which are often used (studies show especially by women) as a starting point for destination-based research. After using such sites to find out about the activities and excursions available, many consumers will move onto UGC-based websites to see which activities (etc.) real-life travelers recommend, as specific websites may harbor unfair bias. Examples of specific direct websites and travel communities are VisitScotland.com, Hotel direct sites, Lonely Planet etc. (Wilson et al., 2012). The remaining category is blogs. Blogs are usually ongoing travelogs maintained by users who either want to share their own experiences or help others along the way with theirs. They can sometimes be fairly private and sometimes very interactive with the public (Pan, MacLaurin, & Crotts, 2007). Often, blogs will contain many photos and essentially more detailed reviews than one would generally leave on a review site. Examples of blogs include Tumblr, Eatingthaifood.com and other individual blogs.

**Reviews from UGC**

**Types of reviews and review categories.** Most studies compare both the sources and the outcomes of the reviews they analyze, and categorize them accordingly. Sources include different types of customers – varying by gender, age range (Liu & Park, 2015), traveler type (budget, luxury, business, etc.) (Escobar-Rodríguez & Carvajal-Trujillo, 2013), traveling group (solo, couple, group of friends, family, etc.), and status as first-time or returning customer. Outcomes, meanwhile, range from negative (Levy, Duan, & Boo, 2013) to mediocre to positive (Melián-González, Bulchand-Gidumal, & López-Valcárcel, 2013). Most studies seek to find correlations between source and outcome, for example whether a particular type of traveler (such as an older traveler or
somebody traveling as a couple or on business) is more likely to leave a positive or negative review of a particular establishment or experience.

**Result analysis’ benefit to hotels.** Content analysis of reviews can help businesses to adapt their modes of operation to improve customer satisfaction. At its most basic level, research shows that positive reviews will encourage a prospective customer to choose one option over another, whilst negative reviews will discourage them (Wilson et al., 2012). Further analysis, however, can reveal more complex links between different types of feedback. An example of this in practice is in the demonstration that a correlation can be recognized between the number of reviews and the overall rating of a business, suggesting both that greater numbers will result in a fairer average and also that businesses may respond to negative reviews by improving those aspects of their company that have been criticized (Melián-González et al., 2013). By evidencing that they take customer reviews seriously and act accordingly when in receipt of negative reviews, businesses can encourage customer loyalty-based behaviors, such as likelihood of repeat visits or of recommendations to other travelers (Levy et al., 2013). Results also demonstrate that reviewers gradually improve their average rating as their number of complete reviews increases, suggestive of a shift in their motivation for providing feedback.

The immediacy of the online culture means that news of a downturn in the services offered by a hotel or business will reach a wide audience very quickly, whereas guidebooks are only able to release new editions with new research every few years. As well as providing the impetus to continually improve their business and maintain high standards, online reviews can work in favor of the business in other ways. If an industry member receives high ratings, studies show that there will be a positive effect on their pricing – logically speaking, if a hotel is demonstratively providing
better service than its competitors (as evidenced by positive reviews), it follows that the cost ought to be slightly higher for the better class of experience (Ogut & Tas, 2012).

Conversely, online complaints will generally influence future attitudes toward the hotel negatively (Vermuelen & Seegars, 2009) and as such will restrict the ability of a hotel to increase their prices, sometimes even when general market trends would dictate an increase. Furthermore, the presence of clientele in the online realm heavily suggests that businesses should be making an increased effort to make their online presence felt, and that they ought to consider their chosen channels of communication carefully – for example, a micro-blogging platform like Twitter can be an ideal, informal and immediate way to respond to customer concerns and complaints, as many businesses – including airlines – have begun to do, whilst giving customers a variety of feedback options and some gentle reminders to share their positive experiences can be a beneficial form of business-consumer interaction across platforms (Wilson et al., 2012).

**Customer Categories from Reviews**

**Business vs leisure traveler.** Research has shown that business users adopt new technology at a faster pace than leisure-seeking customers, most especially concerning mobile app usage and hotels (Verma, Stock, & McCarthy, 2012).

**Demographics such as international, domestics, gender, culture.** With regards to gender, it was noted that women are more likely to consult UGC than their male counterparts, most often corroborating opinions from a combination of both professional and customer-written reviews, whilst men typically use professional reviews as their primary source of pre-departure information (Verma et al., 2012). Consumers from a variety of demographics were shown to consult general online search engines such as Google or Yahoo for their initial research as to what
is available in their destination, before narrowing their search to content-specific web pages such as OTAs, brand websites, and others.

It is also noteworthy that customer satisfaction is inherently linked to customer expectation, and many scientists (Backman & Petrick, 2002) and (Spreng, Mackenzie, & Olshavsky, 1996) have recognized and demonstrated a tangible connection between satisfaction with pre-departure information and satisfaction with the travel experience as a whole, wherein the quality of pre-holiday literature is considered a precursor to the holiday itself (Del Barrio-García, Frías-Jamilena, & López-Moreno, 2012). One explanation for this connection could be that higher-quality pre-departure literature enables a consumer to prepare more effectively for their trip, both emotionally and practically.

First time visitors or repeat customers. New visitors to an area and returning customers tend to have different models of consumption. Whilst first-time travelers are eager to explore a previously undiscovered area and witness all of its attractions, repeat customers tend to prefer seeking specific experiences, such as shopping or food – perhaps reliving highlights from a previous trip (Wilson et al., 2012). First-time visitors are much more likely to respond to gift promotions than repeat customers.

Criticisms of UGC

Despite the popularity of UGC with prospective consumers, some parties remain critical of relying on UGC for accurate information. The criticisms in question can be categorized under two main headings: concerns about the credibility of UGC, and concerns regarding the management of UGC websites.

Credibility. Tanford and Montgomery (2014) propose four key issues with the credibility of user-generated content:
**Trustworthiness** – how do we know that the stranger writing the review is truly impartial and to be believed?

**Expertise** – a disadvantage of hearing the opinions of “people like you” is that, theoretically, they may not have any more knowledge or expertise on the subject than you do, either. However, studies show that most consumers’ decision to book a room based on a review does not depend upon the original reviewer’s expertise.

**Perceptual homophily attitude** – When the desire for ‘sameness’ can cloud an individual’s judgement, both when writing or when reading a review.

**Behavioral intentions** – What was the reviewer’s motivation for writing the review?

There are a number of issues that can affect the perceived credibility of UGC-based websites. It is difficult for an individual to completely trust in the opinion of a stranger, especially when the online setting means we are lacking a great deal of our communicative arsenal, such as the interpretation of facial expression and body language, and also given the anonymity of the online setting. This anonymity could also enable business owners or affiliates to leave non-genuine reviews to bolster their own rating or tarnish that of a competitor – and there are even some reports that companies are hiring themselves as middle men to write positive reviews for a monthly fee from the business concerned. It has already been established that high-quality pre-departure literature can positively affect a consumer’s overall holiday experience, and in this way receiving untruthful information can lead to a dissatisfactory travel experience for the customer (Dickinger, 2010).

**UGC site management.** As with the afore-mentioned credibility concerns, the majority of issues with UGC Site Management relate to the very nature of user-generated content at its core.
Free and easy access to all – This is a two-way concern: if there is free and easy access to all, how can you guarantee the quality of the content? And how do you know that people are who they say they are. On the other hand, without free and easy access to all, those whose access was restricted (for example, if they didn’t want to or couldn’t pay a monthly fee to use the service) would be unrepresented and the sites would no longer necessarily represent a fair cross-section of society.

IP address – and GPS by location.

Fairness – a couple of issues here include the ability of site management to delete or manage posts to give a different overview, and (particularly on brand-specific sites that use customer feedback as a selling point) ensuring a fair sample are featured evenly.

Security and privacy concerns – consumers want to know that their anonymity will be maintained, that it will be secure, and that consumers will have privacy on the site when necessary (i.e. no posting without permission).

Consumer Engagement

Consumer engagement has been described as a “psychological state, which occurs by virtue of interactive customer experiences with a focal agent/object within specific service relationships” (Cabiddu et al., 2014). Consumer engagement is a pivotal element in the popularity of social media and UGC in the hospitality and tourism industries, since social media allows the exchange of information among tourists and can potentially affect future tourists’ experiences. Companies that invest in technologies that allow consumers to engage more easily with the corresponding tourist or company-related object will likely experience a return on this investment as the philosophical value of consumer engagement (opinions being valued) translates to literal, monetary value. Browsing, consuming and contributing to (consumer-generated) media contents and reviews,
active participation in these practices, and tourist blogs or social media marketing are all examples of customer engagement (Cabiddu et al., 2014).

Social media and UGC have become such prevalent forms of customer engagement that research has been undertaken on the subject of the ‘Customer Engagement Cycle’, which can be broken down as such: Connection → Interaction → Satisfaction → Retention → Commitment → Advocacy → Engagement. Cabiddu et al. (2014) put forth the notion of affordances, or “opportunities for action” that just need to be realized when perceived by the right person. For example, whilst a farmer might look upon a hill and see an opportunity for his herd of cattle to graze, an entrepreneur in the tourism industry would see opportunities for tourism-related activities such as hikes, cycling, skiing and climbing. Therefore, an accordance exists when the properties of an object (in this case, the physical attributes of the hill) intersect with the ability of a social agent (in this case, the tourism entrepreneur). In another example, if a computerized tablet is the object and a potential tourism consumer is the agent, the affordance only exists when the consumer, the social agent, engages in the search for information online using the tablet. An example of this at work as a social media-related marketing strategy is in the ability for a hotel or hotel chain to use informal language on Facebook, thus creating new opportunities for said hotel to communicate with, engage with, and connect with consumers instantly. In this case, the object is Facebook and the social agent is the hotel in question, but the affordance only comes from the hotel recognizing the potential in Facebook’s informal atmosphere.

An affordance is the relationship between an object and a social entity, and affordance perception requires a combination of exteroception and proprioception, resulting in copreception. There exist three distinctive social media affordances for customer engagement in tourism, and that these relate to these processes of recognition.
The three distinctive social media affordances as defined by Cabiddu et al. (2014) are as persistent engagement, customized engagement and triggered engagement:

**Persistent Engagement.** Due to the connectivity, sharing functionalities, and content creation that social media allows, it facilitates an ongoing exchange with customers, even when they are not at the property. By rapidly posting information, events, promotions, and pictures, an establishment can maintain current and memorable to their customer base. On a positive note, this can lead to content co-creation through comments and dialogue, but a business also risks leaving itself vulnerable to negative feedback in this way. Those with responsibility for a company’s social media must find the best way to navigate the democratization of customer relationships (Cabiddu et al., 2014; Schroeder & Pennington, 2014).

**Customized Engagement.** Customized engagement offers the opportunity to interact the customers on a personal, individual level, particularly using prior knowledge of the customer, such as their preferences or past conversations or feedback. A firm could befriend the customer on Facebook to have access to their experiences with the hotel, allowing them an in-depth understanding of the individual customer’s needs and therefore the ability to tailor future stays to suit the customer and offer the promotions or gifts that will be most appropriate for that particular customer. However, some customers may feel uncomfortable with this and consider it an invasion of privacy (Cabiddu et al., 2014; Munar & Jacobsen, 2013).

**Triggered Engagement.** This usually involves responding (ideally immediately) to a customer comment, most often on Facebook or Twitter, regarding their experience. This is an example of a firm responding to an external, customer-initiated event. The main advantage of this form of engagement is that it improves a company’s ability to interact with consumers at crucial times during service encounters and that it can also serve as an intelligence-gathering exercise to
help to overcome the existing limitations of a firm’s perpetual systems. However, the customer may have privacy concerns and may question the credibility of the business if the situation is not handled appropriately (Cabiddu et al., 2014; Zhang, Wu, & Mattila, 2014).

The above affordances can be achieved by successful affordance perception. The three processes in affordance perception are as follows (Gibson, 1972 & 1986): 

**Exteroception** – the interaction between an object and an observer’s perceptual systems, such as awareness of social media (Gibson, 1972).

**Proprioception** – the experience of an entity itself, such as awareness of the observer’s characteristics and capabilities (Gibson, 1972).

**Coperception** – a combination of exteroception and proprioception; the awareness of the available objects and entity’s own characteristics (Gibson, 1986).

A recent example of a social media affordance in practice is the launch of Hilton Doubletree’s YouTube channel “Dtour”, in which travelers are encouraged to share details about their trips and become inspired to plan their own trips by hearing stories from others (Crocker, 2013). In order to develop this idea, the marketing team at Hilton Doubletree required a simultaneous awareness of the hotel’s own characteristics (i.e. proprioception) and an understanding of the advertising potential of a YouTube channel (i.e. exteroception) (Cabiddu et al., 2014). A study of the use of affordances by hotels found that low-performing hotels would focus on exteroception or proprioception with little attention paid to establishing the connection between them and developing coperception, whilst high-performing hotels focused primarily on coperception.

There are further types of affordances that have specific relationships to social media described below (Leonardi & Treem, 2012; Azad, Faraj, Kane, & Majchrzak, 2013):
Table 4

**Affordances of Social Media**

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<td>• Behavior Visibility</td>
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<td>• Persistent Conversation</td>
<td>• Triggered attending</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Editability</td>
<td>• Networked informed associating</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Associations that enable community building and access to expertise</td>
<td>• Generative role-taking</td>
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**Consumer Social Media Activity**

Månsson (2011) writes that the "consequence of social media networks is that consumers are not just consuming media - they are also producing and circulating media content…to other consumers" (p. 1640), creating a converged environment for consumption that creates the opportunity for intertextual references to other media products with each new media product introduced. Such convergence and such intertextuality “could therefore be one of the explanations for some places' quick rise to fame as popular destinations” (Månsson, 2011, p. 1648).

A key element for businesses to use the democratization of information to their advantage is to understand the reasons why consumers choose to post – what is their motivation to share? After all, the post-travel behaviors of tourists such as commenting, creating, uploading and sharing their experiences creates new media content and interactions, which will in turn be circulated further, rendering the tourists as bonafide producers of media (Månsson, 2011). Customers might be motivated to share their experiences as a part of focus-related utility, because they feel like their WOM contribution is adding value to the online travel community, or it may have consumption utility, meaning that they will gain value themselves as their media is consumed by others. It might, however, be that an individual is seeking approval and obtains satisfaction when others consume
and approve of or agree with their original contribution (Chitturi, Raghunathan & Mahajan, 2008). A more extreme version of this approval-seeking is a narcissistic motivation that suggests an individual is seeking status, respect and/or gratification for their contribution. It may benefit them to see themselves in a particular way – as a leader or at least a contributor. Lastly, some online contributors may simply enjoy the process of sharing information with others (Wilson et al., 2014).

An important next step for hoteliers and business owners will be to find ways in which to motivate consumers to leave positive feedback, as research shows that travelers are much more likely to review their negative experiences than their positive ones. Some companies are already starting to offer incentives to those who provide feedback, whether positive or constructive, with a view to improving their company. Starbucks, for example, reward some customers with a code for a free drink after completing an online survey about their customer experience. This effectively utilizes the ‘mystery shopper’ technique for feedback whilst almost negating the cost to the company of obtaining poll results. Businesses will always want feedback, positive or negative, because it is the primary way for them to know what changes, if any, need to be made.

**Management of Social Media and UGC**

Nevertheless, many companies still have a long way to go when it comes to maximizing their social media presence and really seeing the most benefit possible from UGC sites; “Lodging companies are in a stage of relative infancy regarding development of comparable systems for unsolicited online reviews” (Barsky & Frame, 2009). For example, Barsky and Frame (2009) report that 85% of hotels have no guidelines whatsoever for monitoring and responding to online reviews, and such a lack of established order has fairly frequently resulted in hotels, restaurants, and other establishments making the news for their lack of customer service, particularly when responding to negative reviews in the online realm. Some companies, however, have begun to use
UGC to their advantage – those cited already include VisitAustralia, but in 2011, Starwood Hotels, which owns several huge brands such as Westin, Sheraton, and St. Regis, started to publish consumer reviews on their hotel websites to encourage user engagement from existing consumers and gain credibility with prospective guests (Zheng, Youn, & Kincaid 2009; Levy et al., 2013).

It has been noted that, if hotels were to engage in more active management of their social media sites, such as their Facebook and Twitter feeds, they would benefit from the immediacy of the exchanges in that dissatisfied customers who are posting about their experience online may still be on the property and staff may still have an opportunity to actively address their concerns and make a positive change to their overall service experience. There are a number of other channels that businesses can use if their own infrastructure does not allow for such a focus on social media management. For example, in recent years, a number of Reputation Management Systems, such as Revinate, Brand Karma, ReviewAnalyst, ReviewPro & ReviewMatrix, have emerged. Such companies allow for an immediate response to customer feedback in most cases, and can provide companies with up-to-date, collated data demonstration aggregation, correlation, and general results, in order to establish priority areas for improvement and areas of current satisfaction.

Furthermore, it is advisable that companies in the hospitality and tourism industries adapt to use social media and user-generated content as a marketing tool in its own right. It has been suggested that they follow this simple ‘step process’:

1. Appearance
2. Promotion
3. Sharing
4. Engagement
5. Purchasing

6. Feedback

Conclusions

Benefits. To conclude, there are numerous benefits to customer and service-provider alike to be gained from embracing the culture of online-experience sharing prevalent in social media and user-generated content platforms. Whilst consumers may have a variety of motivations for posting feedback or sharing their experience online, the most positive outcome of these behaviors will be if their feedback encourages positive change in the establishment they have reviewed, ensuring a higher standard of service for future customers and an improved business model for the establishment itself. From a business point of view, feedback is invaluable in informing you and your staff of their strengths and weaknesses from a customer’s point of view and gives you the opportunity to use any criticism constructively.

The nature of online sharing means that reviewers can benefit from anonymity if they wish, and should they prefer not to, businesses can reward them for their custom and feedback. For larger companies, if they are able to establish really high-functioning feedback systems, they can take steps to individualize their user’s experiences according to the feedback they receive.

Furthermore, positive reviews can be considered one of the best forms of free advertising for a company, particularly for small companies who are starting out and rely much more heavily on WOM and e-WOM. Study demonstrates that a majority of consumers feel that they can place more trust in user-generated reviews than in traditional marketing techniques, and businesses like Starwood Hotels and Visit Australia can use this to their advantage in their own marketing campaigns.
**Improvements, management, and future engagement.** Perhaps the most glaring statistic of all of the sources gathered was that 85% of hotels have no established procedure for responding to customer comments. At present, the UGC realm is largely one-sided, with customer reviews being left and little recognition that they have been seen, responded to, or taken on board by the establishment. Too frequently when businesses do respond, they focus on the negative feedback they have received and falter because they lack an established, diplomatic response to negative feedback.

In the early stages, business in the hospitality and tourism industries just need to start engaging directly, and the easiest way to do this is through triggered engagement. Since the customer has already given you a starting point, you can use that to develop the consumer-business relationship. Businesses should begin by responding to all feedback, thanking customers for their positive comments, and asking for opinions on how to improve from those who leave negative comments. Once a firm has established an online presence that does not come across as invasive or defensive, they are able to go further and establish an online personality. Several firms have been able to do so particularly well using the 140-character limit on Twitter to stay funny, concise and relevant. One example is Taco Bell, whose Twitter makes a point of searching for tweets about Taco Bell and responding to them in humorous yet generally inoffensive ways. This has attracted a lot of positive attention for the Taco Bell brand name, including some apparently unsolicited celebrity endorsements.

Initially, businesses could utilize the Reputation Management Systems available to them to collate data and begin the process while they establish their online presence. Companies should consider offering motivation or rewards for providing feedback, and establishing a system where changes made as a result of constructive criticism are advertised as such – (“You asked for X, and
we did it!”). In this way, a business can use all feedback to its advantage and make its online presence one of its greatest assets. There are people who make five or six figure sums selling their Twitter or Instagram accounts, so the value of the reach of a well-run social media account should not be underestimated.

In this modern age, there is a large proportion of the population who are largely reliant on social media for all of their interaction, including with companies and businesses. Where once maps and guidebooks were used, almost everybody in the 21st century researches their vacations online. This effectively means that social media and user-generated content are essentially an incredibly cheap and unbelievably effective way to increase your company’s reach well beyond its traditional bounds. In 2015, any hotel, restaurant, tour company, or travel agent that is not utilizing social media and user-generated content to extend its reach, improve its reputation, gain popularity and customer loyalty, address company shortcomings, and advertise for free, is missing out on a wealth of opportunity.
Part Three

Introduction

The advent of Web 2.0 and the development of social media has exponentially increased consumer involvement in the hospitality and tourism industries. Websites that include user-generated content and social media networks have altered the landscape of the hospitality industry by making it easier for consumers to share opinions and experiences, and therefore shifting the consumer-business power paradigm in the customer’s favor. Recent studies demonstrate that positive social media presence and reviews indicate a direct correlation with favorable sales and the potential to increase prices (Ogut & Tas, 2012), and as such it has become necessary for businesses and establishments to alter their approaches to customer relations and marketing.

The literary review demonstrated how these broad claims are generally treated as immutable in numerous of the literatures analyzed (Baloglu & Pekcan, 2006; Gazziolo et al., 2008; O’Connor, 2010), and that literature goes on to work outwards from this central assumption to consider the implications for businesses in the hospitality industry more widely. This paper will be by presenting the key findings from the literary review in the section ‘Results/Summary of Findings’, before proceeding to analyze and discuss these results in ‘Interpretation and Context’. From this analysis, the paper will move forward to ‘Implications and Applications’, including a discussion of the best strategies for businesses in the hospitality industry to capitalize on the rise of social media and user-generated content. Finally, the paper will provide a ‘Conclusion’ to this discussion, which will aim to identify any shortcomings and possible directions for future research into the subject.
Results/ Summary of Findings

The following pie charts provide a simple summary of the thirty-six social media and UGC-related research journal articles that this paper analyses. Result of Figure 1 indicate Tourism Management, Cornell Hospitality Quarterly and International Journal of Hospitality Management together occupy more than 60% of the articles used in this paper. Figure 2 shows more than 56% of the articles analyzed in this paper are directly related to the two main topics – Social Media and UGC, the rest are indirect related to those two topics. Figure 3 shows the majority of the articles selected for this paper are using quantitative methods, including different statistical analysis on either survey data or existing secondary data provided from unique hotel brands. Additionally, qualitative studies using case study are also available in the papers. Both qualitative studies and mixed methods can explore more underlying motivations and factors to determine consumer behavior in the technology related content.

Figure 1. Pie Chart of Journal Lists
One of the most universal analyses of the social media and user-generated content phenomenon on the literature review was a comparison between these media forms and so-called ‘mainstream media’. One of the cardinal ways in which social media deviates from the norms of mainstream media is identified as the universality of participation, because anyone can create, comment on, or engage in active debate with social media content. Cabiddu, et al. (2014) identify
this as a notable factor in the power shift between consumer and business, as opinions and advertisements are no longer the sole territory of companies and corporations, meaning that businesses no longer have a monopoly over the image they choose to project to potential customers. Others expand that this new “democratization of information”, and the more active client-company relationship, eliminate the need for a third party and decrease the effectiveness of traditional forms of marketing and communication in the hospitality industry (Dijkmans et al., 2014), an observation supported by Nielsen’s statistical evidence demonstrating that less than half of 28,000 people surveyed trust traditional advertising platforms, whilst 92% trust traditional word-of-mouth and 70% trust online consumer reviews (Nielsen, 2012).

Indeed, social media is considered by many experts as a modern form of word-of-mouth (Allsop et al., 2007; Dellarocas, 2003), and the term EWOM (e-word-of-mouth) has been coined to reflect this status (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004). However, research also shows that there exist some issues with trustworthiness in the online arena, such as the assumption that people ‘just like you’ effectively have no further expertise on the subject, or may have certain behavioral intentions in providing a review (Tanford & Montgomery, 2014). The universality of participation means that there exists an authentication verification problem in the social media and user-generated content arena.

Whilst recognizing the disparity between traditional and online, user-generated mediums, many theorists also distinguish between different types of social media and user-generated content and the different roles that they can play for businesses. Social media outlets, such as Facebook and Twitter provide a direct connection to the hospitality business and its customer service attendants and have a certain level of immediacy, which many businesses (notably airlines) use to maintain real-time relationships with their customers. User-generated content on review sites such
as TripAdvisor, meanwhile, provides the opportunity for customers to provide feedback (usually retrospectively) in a structured environment designed for the purpose, and therefore can be used by businesses to respond to feedback in an equally structured manner, and also to identify and solve issues that their customers have experienced in order to improve future customer experiences.

Photo- and video-sharing mediums such as Instagram, Flickr, and YouTube, are more likely to be used to reflect upon positive experiences and by allowing themselves to be tagged or added as a location, businesses can capitalize upon these jealousy- or desire-inducing forms of free marketing. These sites and social media outlets like Facebook, Twitter, and Tumblr, have a much larger potential reach through devices such as ‘hashtagging’ and ‘trends’. Blogs, meanwhile, often provide much more detail and are used and created by travelers on an ongoing basis. Research has also shown that many potential tourists, most notably women, will check the direct travel website (such as VisitScotland) for initial research on activities, excursions, and accommodation, before moving onto UGC channels for more specific, trustworthy recommendations.

Aside from the different platforms, businesses and theorists have attempted to conduct a content analysis of reviews themselves to identify different trends within the feedback they are receiving. These studies tend to compare sources and outcomes, considering the age, gender, nationality, and traveler type of the reviewer, and also whether they are in a group, a couple or a solo traveler, and a first-time or returning customer – and how positive the review is. The aim of such content analysis is often to identify correlations between source and outcome, such as if a certain type of traveler is more likely to respond positively or negatively to their experience at the establishment.
The most basic analysis has shown that a positive review is more likely to encourage prospective customers to book, and a negative one will discourage them (Wilson et al., 2012). However, some analyses developer and discover that in general, a greater number of reviews means a higher overall score, demonstrating a fairer average and perhaps showing that a company or business has responded to past negative feedback by improving its services (Melián-González et al., 2013). Such forward-thinking responses from businesses have been shown to encourage customer loyalty-based behaviors, such as repeat visits or recommendations (Levy et al., 2013). Research also shows a shift in customer attitudes and motivation for providing feedback over time, as generally customers are more likely to provide positive reviews when the number of reviews provided by them is higher.

It has been identified that some of the most successful marketing campaigns combine the recent primacy of social media and user-generated content with traditional media forms (Dijkmans et al., 2014). For example, several tourism organizations have capitalized on the potential for interaction between social media and traditional forms of commercial communication, particularly the entertainment industry. VisitScotland, VisitBritain and Maison de la France used the success of the movie *The Da Vinci Code* and its settings to promote their services through online channels, particularly Facebook, in a joint venture campaign. The Thai island of Koh Phi Phi also took advantage of the naturally-occurring, destination-based product placement inherent in the use of Maya Bay, Koh Phi Phi Ley, as a central shooting location in the movie *The Beach*. Similarly, Visit Australia used user-generated, first-hand tourist experiences on its Facebook page as a form of advertising.

Using the social and user-generated aspects of Facebook to lay the foundations of a marketing campaign is often successful, as it supports the traditional advertising avenues in a direct
way, since, in 2010 alone, Facebook referred 15.2 million visitors to various tourism websites (PhoCusWright, 2011). Jenkins also comments on the “increased interdependence of communications systems” caused by ‘mediatized tourism’ and the convergence of the roles of the business and the consumer in social-media and user-generated communication environs (Jenkins, 2006).

**Interpretation and Context**

In the Appendix attached after this paper, the first column represents the initial names of those top seven hospitality journals. The second, third and fourth column denote the thirty-six articles’ names, authors and years respectively. The fifth column summarizes three research methods used among all the articles: qualitative study, quantitative study and mixed method study. The sixth column is the number of citations that one article has already had till the time those papers were analyzed for this study. The more frequently an article is cited, the better the quality of the article (Thomson, 2004).

In general, all of the literatures studied identified the importance of engaging in online social media and user-generated media for businesses in the hospitality industry. It is suggested that a failure to do so would afford the consumer too much primacy and allow business owners and companies far less agency in the perception of their business. It has been identified that positive reviews can facilitate price increases (Ogut & Tas, 2012), whilst negative ones will restrict an establishment’s ability to increase prices, even when general trends dictate that it should be so (Vermuelen & Seegars, 2009).

The need to engage with and respond to consumers in the Web 2.0 environment is undeniable, and the literatures studied identify some of the most successful ways to do this. First, a business must establish an online following on as many social media outlets as possible to allow
their own business model and image to be projected widely – particularly by posting photos to Instagram and Facebook, advertising competitions or services through Facebook and Twitter, and allowing their business to be tagged. Essentially, the way in which to engage is three-fold: businesses must first encourage positive feedback through both their online and offline activities, they must respond to negative feedback and use it as a basis for improvement, and must then use the positive outcomes to encourage further custom and further good reviews. Essentially, what Visit Australia did was use their wider reach and traditional media presence to disseminate their good reviews further than simple user-generated content would usually travel. Certainly, the most notable way of capitalizing on social media and UGC is by combining its universality with the legitimacy of traditional media channels, as seen with Visit Scotland, Visit Australia, and others. Other important aspects of this process include continued content analysis of results and continued communication with customers, both on a general scale – by posting Facebook status updates and competitions, for example – and on an individual scale, by responding to specific posts by customers.

**Implications and Applications**

Considering the outcomes of the research conducted in the literary review, there are numerous ways in which the hospitality industry can re-address the shifting consumer-business power paradigm. Aside from running a business as successfully as possible, and considering customer service as a priority in order to garner positive reviews on social media and user-generated content websites, businesses should look at engaging as thoroughly as possible with past customers, existing customers, and potential future clients. One of the key ways in which to encourage feedback, particularly positive feedback, is with a rewards system. Some bars and restaurants already allow you to connect to WiFi for free by ‘checking in’ at their location on
Facebook, but a more positive way of getting the same result is to offer a deal such as “Check-in on Facebook and get 10% off your next order”, which additionally encourages customer loyalty. Competitions on social media often provide a similar result, where social media users are offered the chance at a prize if they ‘like’, ‘share’, or ‘retweet’ the business’ relevant updates. This is an easy way for a company to increase their reach beyond those who already ‘like’ or ‘follow’ their pages to potentially new customers (often with similar interests to those who already follow the page, due to them being friends or acquaintances). Some examples are the Christmas ‘advent calendar’ or giveaways hosted by many travel companies, including British Airways and STA Travel.

When done correctly, responding publicly to customer complaints or queries can do wonders for the reputation of a company or establishment. However, recently, numerous news outlets have reported extremely negatively on business owners who have responded to online complaints without decorum or customer service manners. Facebook and Twitter are arguably the best platforms for this, but it is important for businesses to ensure that their online presence is as professional as their everyday business, despite the more informal atmosphere of social media. Some businesses, such as Taco Bell, have greatly increased their online following by conforming to internet norms – indulging in the use of memes, humor, and tongue-in-cheek tweets to appeal to a broad audience. Others, such as numerous airlines, have been commended for their personalized, professional responses to consumer complaints in the online arena. When customers have chosen to engage with their experience, whether in a positive or a negative manner, they will appreciate the business taking the time to respond in return to show that they have been heard and respected, as long as the response is appropriate.
The final step is to combine these online interactions with traditional forms of media to reach the widest audience possible. Even in this day and age, not everybody is online or able to use social media and UGC websites to their full potential, and these demographics will benefit from further dissemination of the information that is being exchanged online. This does not necessarily solve the issue of trustworthiness of traditional media outlets, as they can choose the reviews or opinions that they wish to advertise, but it does allow them to capitalize on the consumer’s preference for WOM communications. Combining social media and UGC with traditional media and entertainment outlets reinforces the positive opinions that customers have expressed by lending them a sense of legitimacy associated with the mainstream press. Interweaving the two channels plays on the strengths of both.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the research conducted identified that social media and user-generated content are heralding a change in the ways in which consumers interact with their experience in the hospitality and tourism industries. In more detail, it becomes clear that these outlets are generally more trusted by potential clientele and can have a marked influence on a business’ success rate, even dictating price inflation and deflation. The research also indicates, however, that social media and UGC are not seen as infallible forms of information communication, and have issues with authenticity and verification.

As such, the general implication for application of this research is that the most successful way for businesses to utilize these mediums is to combine them with traditional media outlets and forms of advertising or marketing to create a winning combination of trustworthiness, authenticity and legitimacy. The research identified several companies who have been able to conduct this
succesfully, and also noted how dangerous the misuse of social media outlets can be for businesses.

Although content analysis of reviews can be extremely helpful for businesses, the one thing this method of research lacks is an understanding of the business’ efforts outside of the online realm. It is not possible to research in detail the running of each hotel, bar, or restaurant that produces the reviews in the first place. As such, a certain amount of information is not available to a person researching the influence of social media on the hospitality industry – namely, what exactly it is that the reviews are responding to – and as such, even the research must trust the user-generated content to be authentic and accurate.

Moving forward, this research could expand to compare the effectiveness of the various ways in which businesses are interacting through social media and UGC, and further content analysis could be conducted to establish which demographics respond to which forms of advertising most strongly. For example, do an older demographic feel more comfortable responding to traditional advertising? Perhaps if they are less likely to be users of social media, they will benefit especially from having user-generated content presented to them in a format they are more familiar with from TV and print commercials. Further research could also be conducted into the responses of establishments to their negative reviews, both online and in terms of changes they make to the running of their business. In much more detail, the businesses themselves could be monitored to establish how different reviewers respond to the same features.

A great deal of the difficulty in analyzing social media and user-generated content is due to the primacy of personal opinion, which we understand to differ greatly from person to person, even within demographics – two people having the exact same experience may respond very differently to it, and it is certainly impossible for any business to provide the exact same experience
to every client they receive. Whilst the research is not infallible, and a great deal of more extensive exploration may be conducted to further establish the links between user-generated content and the client-business relationship, and how this can be used to the advantage of a company in the hospitality and tourism industry, the overriding conclusion is that these businesses should be making every effort to increase their online presence and use social media to their advantage in order to maintain a competitive edge.
References


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<td>Rob Law, Dimitrios Buhalis, Cihan Cobanoglu</td>
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<td>“Do We Believe in TripAdvisor?” Examining Credibility Perceptions and Online Travelers’ Attitude toward Using User-Generated content</td>
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<td>Lu Zhang, Luorong Wu, Anna S. Mattila</td>
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<td>TM</td>
<td>A stage to engage: Social media use and corporate reputation</td>
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<td>Julian K. Ayeh, Norman Au, Rob Law</td>
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<td>B. Bynum Boley, Vincent P. Magnini, Tracy L. Tuten</td>
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<td>Using social network analysis to explain communication characteristics of travel-related electronic word-of-mouth on social networking sites</td>
<td>Qiuju Luo, Dixi Zhong</td>
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<td>Zhiwei Liu, Sangwon Park</td>
<td>2014</td>
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</table>
CV

Didi Fan
Email: fan@unlv.nevada.edu

PERSONAL SUMMARY
Results - oriented, authentic, creative, conscientious hotelier looking for career opportunities in front office operations with a leading resort and casino in Las Vegas. Specialization in bringing vision to building hotels from ground up, leading through times of change, achieving profit goals, financial analysis, team building and creating strategic plans to ensure business results. Previous knowledge of opening and managing family owned motel offers immediate benefits to a company that seeks for differentiation. Over ten years industry experience, implemented with educational background, interpersonal skills, and multilingual capacities, provided solid foundation for managerial roles.

EDUCATION
University of Nevada, Las Vegas – NV
Master of Science in Hotel Administration
August 2013-May 2015

California State University of Northridge – Northridge, CA
Bachelor of Science in Finance
August 2007- May 2010

Los Angeles Valley College – Valley Glen, CA
Associate of Science in Accounting
August 2004 -May 2007

PROFESSIONAL BACKGROUND
Front Office Manager
South Gate Motel
South Gate, California
August 2013–Present

• Recruiting, hiring and training of staff in preparation & execution of grand opening & daily operations
• Oversee front office operations including Guest Reception, Guest Services, Guest Relations and Concierge.
• Create and maintain all social media accounts (Facebook, Twitter, Foursquare, Website)
• Conduct weekly inventory, ordering and cost control for 90% of total budget
• Perform budget forecasting and revenue analysis; executed room rate revisions/corrections, and adjustments to guest accounts
• Resolve billing issues/disputes for past and future reservations and settlement of in – house guest accounts
**Guest Reception Manager**
Roxford Motel
Sylmar, California
April 2004–August 2013

- Managed Guest Reception, Guest Services and Resort Transportation
- Direct contact with highly discerning guests and provided services with creative problem resolution
- Hired, trained and managed associates
- Managed departmental administrative duties including payroll, scheduling, and ordering
- Attended leadership development courses and participated actively in cross-training among major hotel departments
- Supported continual growth to ensure associates reach their fullest potential, and supported lifelong learning

**Customer Services Representative**
Topco Insurance Agency
Los Angeles, California
August 2006 – May 2008

- Resolved guests’ challenges and associates’ concerns for consistent guest experience & work environment improvement
- Enhanced inter-department communication to streamline customer service
- Demonstrated and sold merchandise among various locations in California

**Experience**
2009 Volunteer Tax Preparer
Los Angeles

- Tax preparation for low income families including filing of tax returns and interviews
- Certified as an IRS-VITA tax preparer at the intermediate level

**KEY COMPETENCIES**

Fluent in Mandarin Chinese
IRS VITA tax software
Proficiency in MS Office
Time management