Social Media in the Tourism Industry:

How Social Media and The Self Congruity Theory affect Destination Choice

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Abstract

This study researches how the tourism indsutry is using social media to create a strong destination image and be in constant communication with their customers. Their customers use social media as a research tool in deciding where to book their next vacation and it helps when booking locations have a destination image for them to see. The destination image can be created from marketing-generated content as well as consumer-generated content on social media sites. When consumers find a destination image that they think suits their personality they are more likely to have a satisfying experience and share their experience on social media through consumer-generated content.

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Chapter 1

Statement of Problem

This research focuses on how social media and the self-congruity theory influence prospective tourists when choosing where to travel. It also examines how travelers share their trip experience online. With both travelers and marketing destination organizations using social media this research explores whether consumers rely more on consumer generated content or marketing generated contnet.

"Psychological research has shown that one's self concept, the sum total of an individual's ideas, thoughts, and feelings about oneself, often dictates specific behavioural patterns (Onkvisit & Shaw, 1987). Through the activation and operation of the self-consistency motive, defined as one's need to behave in ways which will maintain internal consistency (Lecky, 1945; Maslow, 1954), individuals act in ways designed to reinforce an internal belief of who they are." (Lim et al, 2012, p. 197).

Studies of the self-congruity theory in consumer behavior show that "purchase decisions are affected by one's self-concept, with research into the theory generally indicating that consumers have more favourable attitudes towards (Graeff, 1996) and are more likely to consummate purchase of products and brands (Malhotra, 1988; Onkvisit & Shaw, 1987; Sirgy, 1982) perceived consistent with their actual self-image (how they see themselves to be) or ideal self-image (how they wish to be seen)." (Graeff as cited in Litvin et al, 2002, p. 81).

This relates to consumer purchases to travel and visit a destination, based on the consumers congruity with the destination image. In 1992 Kye-Sung Chon first applied the theory

of self congruity to tourism and found that "the higher the agreement between self-concept and destination image, the greater the satisfaction of the tourist." (Beerli et al, 2007, p. 572).

Background of Problem

Traditionally, destination marketing organizations provided consumers with desirable destination images through one way communication. However, social media has given the tourism industry new tools to facilitate effective, two-way communication in which consumer-generated content contributes to the destination image available to prospective tourists (Lim et al, 2012, p. 197). The consumer-generated content can sometimes provide a destination image conflicting with the image provided by destination marketing organizations. This raises the question: With which destination image do prospective travelers find more congruity? The destination image provided by fellow consumers, or those created by marketing organizations?

Purpose of Study

Destination branding is created by marketing generated content as well as consumer-generated content. Organizations and companies have little control over what past visitors put out on social media sites such as TripAdvisor and Yelp! Therefore, consumers and marketers can be providing conflicting destination images. In this case it will be valuable to marketers to discover where prospective tourists place their trust: in the brand image created by marketers, or the brand image created by consumers? This research will provide additional information about how much the connection between destination image and self-image influence a traveler's destination choice.

Setting of Study

This study will be conducted as part of the data collection for the completion of a Senior Project at California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo. Interviews will be conducted with industry professionals in the tourism industry who use social media to better their organization, company, or destination image. The survey will be a sample of convenience and include people who use social media as a means of gathering research about a particular destination.

Research Questions

These questions were devised to combine two aspects of the tourism industry: the self-congruity theory and social media. They are discussed separately in Questions 1 and 2 and then assessed as to how they affect one another in Question 3.

1. How does the self-congruity theory apply to the tourism industry?

2. How are marketing generated content and user generated content of social media sites related within destination branding?

3. How does social media help a prospective traveler choose a satisfying destination through the self-congruity theory?

Definition of Terms

Self-congruity Theory: Self-congruity theory is a conceptual framework that explains self-image (or concept) processes as self-perception and decision-making. Self-image refers to the whole set of attitudes, opinions and cognition that a person has of himself (Klabi, 2012, p. 310).

User-Generated Content: The production of content by the general public rather than by paid professionals and experts in the field. (PC Mag)

Marketing-Generated Content: Content created by marketing teams targeted to a specific audience

Destination Marketing Organizations: Organizations that plan, create and implement marketing plans for specific destinations and places associated with them.

Social Media: forms of electronic communication (as Web sites for social networking and microblogging) through which users create online communities to share information, ideas, personal messages, and other content (as videos). (www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary).

Destination Image: A destination image is "the sum of beliefs, ideas and impressions that a person has of a destination" (Crompton, 1979, as cited in Klabi, 2012, p. 311).

Destination Branding: The objective of a destination branding strategy is to reflect and identify a unique and differentiable destination image (Keller, 1993, as cited in Klabi, 2012, p. 311).

Organization of the Study

This study is organized into 5 chapters. Chapter 1 introduces the problem and provides background about the theory. Chapter 2 is a review of the literature already presented about the subject of the self-congruity theory in tourism. Chapter 3 will discuss the methodology. Chapter 4 is a review of the survey data and interviews. It will end with a summary of the study and advice for the future research of social media in the tourism industry.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

This review of literature is based on previous studies regarding the effect of the self-congruity theory on a consumer's destination choice. It also takes into account that destination identities are no longer created solely by destination marketing organizations. Social media has allowed for consumer generated content to contribute to the destination image presented to the public. When a destination image resonates with a traveller's self-idea, how they see themselves, it is expected that the traveller will have a more satisfying trip.

The Self-Congruity Theory and Traveler Destination Choice

The self-congruity theory has its roots in Greek philosophy, but American philosopher William James is credited with laying the foundation for the idea of the self and many of its theories (Beerli et al, 2007, p. 572). The self-image can be defined as "the total sum of what a man thinks of himself, including his body and intellect, as well as his belongings, family, reputation, and work," (Loudon and Della Bitta as cited in Berrli et al, 2007, p. 572). Self-congruity theory explains the effect of self-image (or concept) on the decision-making process (Klabi, 2012, p. 310).

The "decision-making process involves the evaluation of not only the utilitarian or functional attributes of a product, but also the value-expressive or personality-related attributes of the product." (Chon, 360). Similarly, brand images can also be classified as "symbolic" and "functional". Symbolic images refer to the stereotypic personality images consumers have of a

specific product, and functional images refer to the physical benefits associated with the product (Chon, 360).

Within the tourism industry, a destination image is "the sum of beliefs, ideas and impressions that a person has of a destination" (Crompton, 1979, as cited in Klabi, 2012, p. 311). It has "symbolic" value-expressive attributes that contribute to the brand personality of a destination. When a tourist finds a destination brand personality congruent with their own self-concept, that is known as self-congruity (Boksberger et al, 2011, p. 455).

The self-congruity theory was first applied to the tourism industry in 1992 by Kye-Sung Chon (Beerli et al, 2007, p. 572). Kye-Sung Chon at the University of Nevada-Las Vegas, USA conducted a study using the self-image/product image congruity model of the self-concept theory, to examine the relationship between a tourist's self-concept and his or her satisfaction or dissatisfaction with a destination. The results of the study and those that followed found that "the higher the agreement between self-concept and destination image, the greater the satisfaction of the tourist." (Beerli et al, 2007, p. 572).

A study by Kabli cites a study by Litvin and Goh (2002) further confirming that self-image congruity influences a consumer's pre-trip interest in a destination and purchase likelihood. A study by Kastenholz also adds that greater destination-self-image leads to greater probability that a tourist will recommend that destination to another (Klabi, 2012, p. 313). Kabli used Tunisia, a North African tourist destination, and conducted qualitative research and produced a survey of 442 subjects. The findings supported the idea that congruity on a number of personality traits would enhance tourist "preference for the destination" (Klabi, 2012, p. 310).

Brand Identity, Destination Marketing Organizations and User-Generated Content

Before the internet, destination marketing organizations reached a targeted market of tourists by brand advertising for a destination resulting in one-way communication with the consumer. The internet has allowed for two-way communication between DMOs and the consumer with the use of social media (Lim et al, 20012, p. 197). DMOs post their activities on social sites such as blogs, YouTube and Facebook resulting in consumer responses and feedback.

Lim cites Blackshaw to define social media as an internet-based application that conveys consumer-generated content (2012, p. 199). This allows for the consumer to participate in the development of a destination identity/image (Hipperson as cited in Lim et al, 2012, p. 198). It can have a positive effect if the consumers are satisfied, but if the consumer is unsatisfied it can lead to negative reviews (Trusov et al., 2009 as cited in Lim et al, 2012, p. 198).

Negative reviews can be dangerous for a hotel or destination because, "according to Xiang and Gretzel (2010), social media sites are substantially directed to those who look for travel information through search engines...social media has become one of the major sources of online travel information," (O'C¸ onnor, 2008; Xiang and Gretzel, 2010 as cited in Lim et al, 2012, p. 198).

Tourists create consumer-generated content of their travels that can influence an audience of prospective tourists. Consumer-generated content is considered "a mixture of fact and opinion, impression and sentiment, founded and unfounded tidbits, experiences, and even rumor" (Blackshaw and Nazzaro as cited in Lim et al, 2012, p. 199). It consists of content such as videos, photos, essays or blog posts aimed at educating other consumers about products, brands, services, and issues (Blackshaw and Nazzaro as cited in Lim et al, 2012, p. 199).

Now that consumers have an outlet for their personal experiences in the same place as DMOs consumers in the midst of their purchase decision process have a lot more information on which to base their decision (Xiang and Gretzel as cited in Lim et al, 2012, p. 199).

Social media influences the decision making process of prospective tourists (Volo, 2010, as cited in Lim et al, 2012, p. 199), but because it is produced among consumers themselves, it can challenge DMOs (Xiang and Gretzel as cited in Lim et al, 199). This raises the question: Where do prospective tourists put their trust when researching social media - with DMOs, or with fellow consumer-generated content?

Lim and others at the Virginia Tech and Oklahoma State University set out to answer this question by analyzing comments and views of consumer-generated videos (CGV) and marketing-generated videos (MGV) that contributed to the destination image of Las Vegas (the chosen location of which to test consumer reaction to CGVs and MGVs). They found that consumer-generated videos had more views than marketing-generated videos (Lim et al, 2012, p. 203). Consumers also had different perceptions of videos created by consumer and videos created by marketing organizations.

Lim found that when it comes to consumer generated videos, their impact on destination image is far from a positive one (2012, p. 202). Consumers who watched CGVs about Las Vegas contributed argumentative comments and reacted more to negative stimulation. On the other hand, consumers who watched marketing generated videos contributed information about various attractions and activities in Las Vegas (2012, p. 204).

They also concluded that consumer generated videos attracted more people than marketing generated videos. "According to Qualman (2009), traditional advertisements have less

trustfulness than opinions by peers to consumers. Also, individuals are more likely to look up peer posts than postings by an online news site." (Lim et al, 2012, p. 205).

This being stated, marketing organizations must take action monitoring prominent consumer uploaders. Marketers can encourage avid posters to put up quality content about the destination to create a destination brand in line with what the marketing organization wants consumers to see (Lim et al, 2012, p. 205).

Choosing a Satisfying Destination Through the Self-Congruity Theory and Social Media

A consumer decision process has four stages: consider, evaluate, buy, and advocate. Tourists go through these stages when making travel purchases, but social media has made the evaluate and advocate stages increasingly relevant (Hudson and Thal, 2013, p. 157). Tourism marketers need to consider the significance of those stages and use it to their advantage.

Working from stage one, marketers use social media to drive traffic to tourism sites (Tussyadia & Fesenmaier, 2009, as cited in Hudson and Thal, 2012, p. 157). Just as VisitBritain did in their 2011 "Unite and Invite" campaign to drive traffic to their Love UK Facebook page. The campaign gained 25,000 fans to the Facebook page (Brinker, 2011, as cited in Hudson and Thal, 2013, p. 157).

During the evaluation stage consumers research markets and other outlets for information about the product they are considering. "Companies are no longer the unrivaled experts on the attributes or quality of brand and products," (Hudson and Thal, 2013, p. 157). In fact, fellow consumer opinion is often more influential than marketers efforts to persuade consumers. Customer reviews that allow for consumer-to-consumer interaction can be found directly on

tourism company websites, company blogs, sites such as TripAdvisor.com, or personal blogs (Hudson and Thal, 2013, p. 158).

Social media and e-commerce is being implemented into the buying stage as well. With destination research conducted online, it is no wonder that the travel sector accounts for a third of all global e-commerce activity (Carey, Kang & Zea, 2012, as cited in Hudson and Thal, 2013, p. 158). Once the purchase is made the advocate stage commences. During this phase more interaction and a deeper brand connection is created online with touch points not completely utilized in traditional purchaser funnel models of communication. These touch points can include social media campaigns such as Vail's EpicMix for skiers and geolocation social platforms such as FourSquare, Gowalla and Loopt (Hudson and Thal, 2013, p. 158).

In the final stage, social media is being as a means of self-improvement. American Airlines monitors their Twitter to respond to customer complaints and incorporate consumer feedback. This new consumer decision process incorporating social media allows consumers to be a part of each stage and have a place to voice their opinion throughout the process. When choosing a destination tourists are now more informed with the addition of fellow consumer opinion to destination brand information rather than solely relying on ads provided by marketing organizations. A more informed search allows for tourists to have a more satisfying trip.

Chapter 3

Methodology

This chapter will discuss the methods of data collection which include data sources, collection and presentation of data, and delimitations.

Data Sources

For this study interview subjects included a working professional in the tourism industry, an intern at Contiki, and a psychology professor. A survey was conducted using a sample of convenience was gathered via social media. The interview questions were tailored to each individual's area of knowledge to get the most relevant information regarding social media, the self-congruity theory, and tourism.

Participants

The tourism industry professional was Brittany Garcia, Visit San Luis Obispo County's Community and Member Relations Manager. Garcia manages all of the social media outreach for Visit SLOC. The Contiki intern was Christine Glueckert. Contiki plans, organizes, and implements vacations all around the world catering to 18-35 year olds and has been doing so since 1962. The psychology professor was Dr. Daniel Levi of the Cal Poly San Luis Obispo Department of Psychology and Child Development. Dr. Levi has experience in tourism research and taught courses in Environmental Psychology, Behavior in Organizations, Teamwork, and Group Dynamics.

The survey was collected as a sample of convenience. There was a series of 5 questions answered on a voluntary basis. The questions were selected to find out how tourists go about collecting data about a destination and their destination decision making process.

Interview Design

The following questions were asked to Brittany Garcia:

1. How would you describe the type of visitors that come to San Luis Obispo and what are they looking for when they come here?

2. How would you describe San Luis Obispo's destination image?

3. How do you use social media to create a desirable image of San Luis Obispo to prospective visitors?

4. By branding a location, there is an ideal image that you would like the public to associate with San Luis Obispo, yes? And you create content to match that image, what do you do when consumer generated content conflicts with the image you are putting out?

5. How has social media and the ability to connect with your audience on a more personal level allowed you to create a more appealing destination image of San Luis Obispo?

The following questions were asked to Christine Glueckert:

1. While at Contiki how did you use social media to market trips to prospective travelers?

2. What adjectives would you use to describe the audience Contiki wants to attract?

3. Did Contiki put more emphasis on social media or traditional advertisements as a means of marketing to their audience?

4. What were your goals as part of the marketing team to improve Contiki's reach to their audience?

The following questions were asked to Dr. Levi:

1. How would you define the self congruity theory?

2. How does the self-congruity theory relate to a tourist's destination choice?

3. How does the self-congruity theory contribute to a more satisfying trip and increase the likelihood of encouraging others to make the same trip?

The survey was a series of multiple choice questions

1. Where have you traveled?

2. What was the most significant source of information that made you want to travel there?

3. Was your idea of the destination influenced more by consumer generated content or by marketing generated content.

4. Please rate the following statement: "I wanted to travel to the most recent place I traveled because it was similar to my self-concept (the way you think about or perceive yourself)"

5. What would dissuade you from visiting a certain location?

Data Collection

Data collection for this study was interviews with a tourism industry professional, a hospitality management major, and a psychology professor. The interviews were conducted via email during May 2013. The questions were tailored to each individual regarding their relation to either the tourism industry, social media or the self-congruity theory. Tailoring the questions

allowed for multiple perspectives regarding the research questions and allowed for the most information to be extracted from their area of expertise.

The survey data was collected from participants on a volunteer basis. They were asked a series of questions regarding their intake of social media and other means of information and the effect it has on their choice of vacation destination.

Data Presentation

The interviews with Garcia and Glueckert were conducted via email in which they were sent questions and then replied with the answers. The interview with Dr. Levi was conducted in person. Their answers were complete and in depth, there was no need for further clarification.

Limitations

The limitations of this study are that the course to complete this project was only ten weeks to complete the research and data collection. The quarter system utilized by California Polytechnic State University is a series of three ten-week long quarters Fall, Winter, and Spring.

Delimitations

The delimitations of this research was that the number of interviews was limited because of the ten week limit to complete the data collection. Due to the limited amount of time there were only three interviews conducted and only 34 responses to the survey.

Chapter 4

Data Analysis

This chapter will provide further details about the interviewed subjects as well as their answers to the respective questions. Data will be summarized in the form of direct quote as well as paraphrase. Their answers will be compared to the research results found in Chapter 2 and the survey results. As well as helping to answer the research questions on which this paper is based.

Description of Interview Subjects

Tourism Industry and Social Media Professional

Brittany Garcia works for Visit San Luis Obispo County (VSLOC). As stated on the VSLOC Facebook page they are, "dedicated to the positioning, branding and promoting of San Luis Obispo County as a choice destination for regional, national, and global visitors." Garcia handles all of the social media outreach for VLSOC.

Contiki Intern

Christine Glueckert graduated from St. John's University with a degree in Hospitality Management. She interned at Contiki during her senior year 2007-2008. Contiki describes themselves as the world leader in youth travel, arranging trips for 18-35-year-olds across Europe, Australia, New Zealand, Asia, Latin America & North America. As part of the internship program Contiki sends their interns on a trip to ensure they will have the experience worth sharing to encourage others to book trips through Contiki.

Psychology Professor

Dr. Levi is part of the Psychology and Child Development Department at California Polytechnic State University at San Luis Obispo. He has extensive experience in tourism research and has taught courses in behavior, teamwork, group dynamics, and environmental psychology. His research interests also include environmental sustainability, historic preservation and cultural differences.

Interview Responses

Brittany Garcia: These questions were specific to the San Luis Obispo area because that is Garcia's area of expertise. They analyze San Luis Obispo's destination image, and the type of visitors to that destination. Through this interview the research questions are applied to a real working experience in the tourism industry.

1. How would you describe the type of visitors that come to San Luis Obispo and what are they looking for when they come here?

> "The visitor is active, enjoys the outdoors whether it be hiking, surfing, biking, camping, fishing, etc. The visitor comes here to experience our beautiful area… experience is a key word. The San Luis Obispo visitor doesn't want to watch the sunset from a car they want to get on the sand while the water cover their toes and watch the sun go down."

2. How would you describe San Luis Obispo's destination image?

> "The destination image is welcoming, authentic, and real."

3. How do you use social media to create a desirable image of San Luis Obispo to prospective visitors?

"We use images to portray our beautiful area. To communicate our welcoming and

friendly environment we take every opportunity to talk about the local people that live

here. For example in our annual Visitors Guide (our main marketing tool) we highlight

six locals and talk about who they are and why they choose to live here.

4. By branding a location, there is an ideal image that you would like the public to associate with

San Luis Obispo, yes? And you create content to match that image, what do you do when

consumer generated content conflicts with the image you are putting out?

"Yes, that is correct. In the case where consumer generated content does not match the

image that we are trying to portray we address the issue and communicate with the

consumer to resolve their concerns."

5. How has social media and the ability to connect with your audience on a more personal level

allowed you to create a more appealing destination image of San Luis Obispo?

"Social media allows us to engage with our audience, highlighting our most appealing

attributes and connecting on many different levels. People are always on social

networks… all day long and now we can stay in front of them constantly."

Christine Glueckert:

1. While at Contiki how did you use social media to market trips to prospective travelers?

"Our first assignment after our training trip was to create a daily blog of our trip in order

to peak people's interest and reach out to prospective travelers via the web. Even after meeting

possible travelers in person we could refer them to blogs to really get a feel for what a Contiki

trip is like. We had to create Facebook groups within our University community to promote

Contiki to our local student base. I would often check the Contiki forums and other web travel

forums for people interested in Contiki or Contiki style trips to offer suggestions and information about what Contiki could offer. After beginning contact with prospective travelers, we kept a Prospect List, through which we were able record all their information regarding their trip interests and we followed up regularly with emails and special deals that related to their interests."

2. What adjectives would you use to describe the audience Contiki wants to attract?

"Young, adventure-ist, fun, outgoing, friendly, easygoing, open-minded and enthusiastic."

3. Did Contiki put more emphasis on social media or traditional advertisements as a means of marketing to their audience?

"Contiki wanted us to cover all aspects of marketing, from on campus events, posting flyers, providing brochures, and the entire web based activity. Throughout the internship I received the most feedback and sales via my internet marketing activity, as I think was the case with most other interns as well. Things like Twitter or Instagram weren't mainstream at the time, but I would expect that by now those are key marketing areas for a company like Contiki."

4. What were your goals as part of the marketing team to improve Contiki's reach to their audience?

"My goal was to find as many ways possible to reach out to prospective travelers. I would do a lot of internet research to find new travel sites that people visit and convert them to Contiki travelers. I would keep up with personal messages once I knew someone showed interested in a Contiki tour. I tried to create new activities, web blasts and eye catching flyers around campus in order for Contiki to stand out. I got the most value from relaying my personal

Contiki trip experiences with other people, it showed that I really enjoyed the trips that Contiki offered and made it more relatable to others than just having them pick up a brochure."

Dr. Levi:

1. How would you describe the self congruity theory?

"I have many selves, so self-congruity theory means many things. It's partially my self-image, partially the kind of person I think I am...With self-congruity and self-concept in relation to activity I only pick some of my multiple selves that relate to tourism."

2. How do you think the self-congruity theory relates to the decision process?

"[Personally]...When I think about different things, different activities, different places to go I think about how it relates to different aspects of myself. So I think there's this screening process, I think of myself as this kind of person so there are things that I don't do...So partly that decision process blocks out or eliminates stuff, and then sometimes it used to help guide and make decisions between alternatives."

3. What do you think is the correlation between the self-congruity theory and customer satisfaction with a product (in this case the product is travel)?

"It depends on which aspect of myself I want to apply to the situation...to me its almost the opposite, if I go on a vacation and I have a good time I explain it by being congruent."

4. So when you find that destination to match with one of your many selves that is what is considered a good match?

"Yes. So it's like I go visit San Luis I have a good time here congruity theory came into my selection try this place, but I don't think it comes as much into my experience here as it comes into my remembrance and my telling other people. So for example, if I know you're a

kayaker like me I am going to tell you about the great kayaking opportunities because when I talk I try to find a common interest to talk about." So congruity theory has more to do with the decision process of choosing the destination and post travel sharing of experience on social sites such as Tripadvisor.

Survey Results: The survey was a sample of convenience designed to gather information from an audience that actively uses social media. The survey was conducted through Facebook by a link to the survey site. The objective of the survey was to see what factors influenced a traveler's decision making process in choosing a destination to visit. The results are rounded to the nearest tenth of a percent.

1. Where have you traveled?

The majority of participants, at 85%, answered Europe.

Where Traveled?	Europe	Asia	Australia	Africa	North America	Central America	South America
% of Total Responses	85.3	26.5	14.7	20.6	82.4	41.2	26.5

2. What was the most significant source of information that made you want to travel there?

Word-of-mouth and consumer-generated content were the two most answered out of the options (social media, marketing generated content, traditional media). In the "other" objective box three out of the six answered a desire to travel the world and experience different cultures as being influential in their decision.

Info Source	Social Media	Word-of-Mouth	Traditional Media	MGC	CGC
% of Total Responses	21.9	68.8	37.5	9.4	50

3. Was your idea of the destination influenced more by consumer generated content (opinions of fellow travelers on social site such as Tripadvisor and Yelp!) or marketing generated content (advertisements created destination marketing organizations)?

 The majority of responses stated that neither influenced their decision. However those that were influenced there were more responses that consumer generated content influenced them more than marketing generated content.

MGC vs CGC	CGC	MCG	Neither	Both
% of Total Responses	32.4	2.9	41.2	23.5

4. Please rate the following statement: "I wanted to travel to the most recent place I travelled because I felt the destination personality was similar to my self-concept (how you think about or perceive yourself)"

 The highest response at 41% was that participants said they somewhat agree with this statement.

Self Congruity	Strongly Agree	Somewhat Agree	Slightly Agree	Neutral	Slightly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Strongly Disagree
% of Total Responses	14.7	41.2	17.6	8.8	11.8	2.9	2.9

5. What would dissuade you from visiting a location?

The majority of responses at 70% said that crime would deter them from visiting a location. The second most answered was respondents who said they would be discouraged from visiting a location if they did not find congruity with the destination.

Dissuade	Crime	Weather	Language Barrier	Not Congruent
% of Total Responses	69.7	12.1	3.0	15.2

Chapter 5

Discussions and Recommendations

Summary

This study was based on the necessity of social media in the tourism industry. The tourism industry has realized that Social media allows for two way communication between consumers and therefore needs to be taken advantage of as a marketing tool. (Hotel Business, August 2012).

Andrew Gajary, general manager of the InterContinental New York Times Square. Expresses this necessity,

"The next generation of customers and the [current] generation have turned to social media to get information...It's quick, immediate, up-to-date and it's always at their fingertips. If we want to connect and have an effective campaign, that's the way. It's not an option —it's definitely a requirement." (*Hotel Business*, 2012, p. 12).

With social media gaining significance in destination marketing, consumers have a variety of sources through which they can research destinations. Social media content can be created by marketing organizations as well as consumers. Research has found that if consumers found self-congruity with a destination they are more likely to share that experience on social media sites such as TripAdvisor. This allows for consumers to be more resourceful in finding congruity with a destination as opposed to solely traditional marketing techniques by marketing organizations.

"The 'online' traveller that was previously 'offline' is not a different traveller, he or she just has many more tools at their disposal now in order to research, construct and buy the travel combination that best suits their needs." (Oqvist, 2006, p. 38).

Discussion

By comparing the data from Chapter 2, the interviews, and the survey the following information was gathered regarding the research questions.

Research Question #1: How does the self-congruity theory apply to the tourism industry?

According to Dr. Levi, the Cal Poly Psychology Professor, the self-congruity theory comes into play when a tourist is deciding where to travel, and post trip when they share their experience with others. Stating that an individual has many selves, Dr. Levi proposes that people only look to some of their selves when deciding where to travel. He personally sated, if "I go visit San Luis I have a good time here congruity theory came into my selection try this place, but I don't think it comes as much into my experience here as it comes into my remembrance and my telling other people."

That is where sites such as TripAdvisor come into play. They give consumers a platform on which to tell others about their travel experience. This sharing gives consumers honest opinions from fellow travelers about a destination.

The survey results show the importance of sharing travel experience and how influential consumer opinions are in others decision making process. When asked what was the most significant source of information that made them want to travel there, 69% said word of mouth and consumer generated content came in as the second most significant. This shows how the remembering and sharing part of the self-congruity theory affects other's destination choice.

As stated in Chapter 2 by Klabi, a destination image is "the sum of beliefs, ideas and impressions that a person has of a destination" (Crompton, 1979, as cited in Klabi, 2012, p. 311). The destination image can be marketed to a specific audience that would find self-congruity with that destination.

When it comes to the marketing side of tourism, Brittany Garcia and Christine Glueckert, each represent a company that markets to a specific audience. Garcia markets a destination image of San Luis Obispo that would resonate with a tourist who "enjoys the outdoors whether it be hiking, surfing, biking, camping, fishing, etc." Whereas Glueckert, working for Contiki, markets to a different audience. She described Contiki travelers as, "young, adventure-ist, fun, outgoing, friendly, easygoing, open-minded and enthusiastic."

The difference between these two audiences shows that there are many sources and many destinations that a potential traveller would be able to find congruity with, and the use of the internet and social media makes the research process that much easier.

Research Question #2: How are marketing generated content and user generated content of social media sites related within destination branding?

As stated in Chapter 2, "social media has become one of the major sources of online travel information," (O'C̦onnor, 2008; Xiang and Gretzel, 2010 as cited in Lim et al, 2012, p. 198). With social media comes marketing and consumer generated content. The survey results reveal that marketing generated content was the least influential when responders formed a destination image and consumer generated content was the most influential.

Garcia stated that using social media allows marketing destination organizations, like the one she works for, to connect and communicate with their audience on many different levels. Those lines of communication help hotels improve their locations and address consumer concerns in the form of consumer generated content challenges what the marketing organization wants their audience to see. "In the case where consumer generated content does not match the image that we are trying to portray we address the issue and communicate with the consumer to resolve their concerns," Garcia said.

In the case of Contiki, consumer generated content and marketing generated content were somewhat similar because Glueckert was a consumer (she went on a trip) as well as a marketer (interning at the company). Her social media content generating began during her Contiki trip by blogging and creating an online presence throughout the trip. She utilized Facebook and online travel forums to convert travelers to Contiki. "Throughout the internship I received the most feedback and sales via my internet marketing activity," Glueckert said. This shows the effectiveness of a well-run social media and internet campaign.

Research Question #3: How does social media help a prospective traveller choose a satisfying destination through the self-congruity theory?

Social media helps a traveler in the decision making process as well as making it easy for them to share their experience post trip. As stated in Chapter 2, when researching destinations to visit fellow consumer opinion is often more influential than marketers efforts to persuade consumers. Customer reviews that allow for consumer-to-consumer interaction can be found directly on tourism company websites, company blogs, sites such as TripAdvisor.com, or personal blogs (Hudson and Thal, 2013, p. 158). The self-congruity theory also comes into play at this stage of the decision process. Dr. Levi explains that correlation.

"I think there's this screening process, I think of myself as this kind of person so there are things that I don't do...So partly that decision process blocks out or eliminates stuff, and then sometimes it used to help guide and make decisions between alternatives," Dr. Levi said.

The self-congruity theory and social media allows consumers to find congruity with a variety of content because marketers are not the sole providers of information anymore. Consumers can make more informed decisions because social media has given them more options with consumer-generated content.

The survey results showed that the majority of people visited the last place they traveled to because they felt it was slightly, somewhat, or strongly congruent with their self-concept. Therefore, people find congruity with a destination through social media, and social media allows travellers to share their experience upon return to continue the flow of consumer-generated content.

Recommendations for Further Study

The tourism industry deals with potential travelers, people on a trip, and people returning from a trip and sharing their experience. With social media, these travelers now have more tools to better equip them in every aspect of travel from research and purchase to experiencing and sharing. The hotels and travel companies that use social media to better equip their customers by creating a more tailored travel experience are the ones that will prosper, and those who do not will be left behind (Oqvist, 2006, p. 38).

As a result of the studies on the subject of social media in the tourism industry it would be wise for hotels and marketing organizations to have a strong presence on social media allowing for consistent and effective two way communication between themselves and the consumer.

Consumers now look to social media to get information. Brittany Garcia described the importance of social media in company efforts to engage with customers and highlight their most appealing attributes. It allows them to connect with consumers on many different levels, and because people are always on social networks, companies like Visit San Luis Obispo County can stay in front of their audience constantly.

Study Conclusion

The findings of this study show that it would be a mistake for hotels and marketing destination organizations to not have a presence on social media. The amount of time consumers spend on social media can be utilized to present a destination image to consumers. It also serves as a way to converse with consumers and share information about updates, deals, and giveaways.

It is also apparent that there needs to be more research done regarding consumer opinions and trust in consumer-generated content and marketing-generated content. The research presented in Chapter 2 shows that based on Lim's research, consumer-generated videos recieved more views than marketing generated videos. However, the results of watching those videos elicited very different responses. Showing that the reaction to consumer generated videos was somewhat negative and the marketing generated video reactions were more conducive to informing others about actual activities and events in Las Vegas. Another limitation to that study is the videos were only from one location that already has an interesting destination image attached to it which could have created controversial responses.

More research can be done on the self-congruity theory's impact on a traveler's post-trip sharing. The way Dr. Levi proposed the self-congruity theory impacts the tourism industry is that it is present in the decision of where to travel and post travel remembrance and sharing of the experience. It would be interesting to see how consumers decide how, where and when they share their travel experience. This can be conducted through further research.

The findings of this study are applicable to destination marketing organizations and hotels who do not already have a presence on social media. The findings of the research in Chapter 2 shows that it is beneficial to have a social media presence for a variety of reasons. A constant voice in social media allows marketers to always be infront of their consumers and be in constant contact with them. Communication is key when it comes to pleasing customers and creating a more satisfying trip for them. After a satisfying trip consumers can in return post their own content on social media providing additional information about a destination for fellow travelers.

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Appendix A

Interview transcripts: Brittany Garcia

MS: How would you describe the type of visitors that come to San Luis Obispo and what are they looking for when they come here?

BG: The visitor is active, enjoys the outdoors whether it be hiking, surfing, biking, camping, fishing, etc. The visitor comes here to experience our beautiful area… experience is a key word. The San Luis Obispo visitor doesn't want to watch the sunset from a car they want to get on the sand while the water cover their toes and watch the sun go down.

MS: How would you describe San Luis Obispo's destination image?

BG: The destination image is welcoming, authentic, and real.

MS: How do you use social media to create a desirable image of San Luis Obispo to prospective visitors?

BG: We use images to portray our beautiful area. To communicate our welcoming and friendly environment we take every opportunity to talk about the local people that live here. For example in our annual Visitors Guide (our main marketing tool) we highlight six locals and talk about who they are and why they choose to live here.

MS: By branding a location, there is an ideal image that you would like the public to associate with San Luis Obispo, yes? And you create content to match that image, what do you do when consumer generated content conflicts with the image you are putting out?

BG: Yes, that is correct. In the case where consumer generated content does not match the image that we are trying to portray we address the issue and communicate with the consumer resolve their concerns.

MS: How has social media and the ability to connect with your audience on a more personal level allowed you to create a more appealing destination image of San Luis Obispo?

BG: Social media allows us to engage with our audience, highlighting our most appealing attributes and connecting on many different levels. People are always on social networks… all day long and now we can stay in front of them constantly.

Appendix B

Interview transcripts: Christine Glueckert

MS: Where did you attend college and what was your major?

CG: St. John's University, Hospitality Management.

MS: What year and for how long did you intern at Contiki?

CG: I interned for Contiki during my senior year, July 2007-May 2008.

MS: While at Contiki how did you use social media to market trips to prospective travelers?

Yes. Our first assignment after our training trip was to create a daily blog of our trip in order to peak people's interest and reach out to prospective travelers via the web. Even after meeting possible travelers in person we could refer them to blogs to really get a feel for what a Contiki trip is like. We had to create Facebook groups within our University community to promote Contiki to our local student base. I would often check the Contiki forums and other web travel forums for people interested in Contiki or Contiki style trips to offer suggestions and information about what Contiki could offer. After beginning contact with prospective travelers, we kept a Prospect List, through which we were able record all their information regarding their trip interests and we followed up regularly with emails and special deals that related to their interests.

MS: What adjectives would you use to describe the audience Contiki wants to attract?

CG: Young, Adventurist, Fun, Outgoing, Friendly, Easygoing, Open-minded, Enthusiastic

MS: Did Contiki put more emphasis on social media or traditional advertisements as a means of marketing to their audience?

CG: Contiki wanted us to cover all aspects of marketing, from on campus events, posting flyers, providing brochures, and the entire web based activity. Throughout the internship I received the most feedback and sales via my internet marketing activity, as I think was the case with most other interns as well. Things like Twitter or Instagram weren't mainstream at the time, but I would expect that by now those are key marketing areas for a company like Contiki.

MS: What were your goals as part of the marketing team to improve Contiki's reach to their audience?

CG: My goal was to find as many ways possible to reach out to prospective travelers. I would do a lot of internet research to find new travel sites that people visit and convert them to Contiki travelers. I would keep up with personal messages once I knew someone showed interested in a Contiki tour. I tried to create new activities, web blasts and eye catching flyers around campus in order for Contiki to stand out. I got the most value from relaying my personal Contiki trip experiences with other people, it showed that I really enjoyed the trips that Contiki offered and made it more relatable to others than just having them pick up a brochure.

Appendix C

Interview transcrips: Dr. Daniel Levi

MS: How would you describe the self-congruity theory?

DL: "I have many selves, so self-congruity theory means a variety of different things: It's partially my self-image, it's partially the kind of person I think I am, it's kind of the person I like to do things. So like in recreation, mostly unless I was Catholic, which I'm not, I don't really think about my religious beliefs or spiritual beliefs relating to recreation, but it does relate to my self-concept. So, to me with self-congruity and self-concept and activity I only pick some of my multiple selves that relate to tourism and I don't expect anything to relate to all of my multiple selves and I really think of people as having multiple selves. My image interacting in with students is different than my image interacting at home. I am on some levels, a different person."

MS: How do you think self-congruity theory relates to the decision process?

DL: "Well...If you ask people if they're honest they almost always tell you yes. If you ask people if they lie on their income taxes they mostly tell you yes. They just don't apply honesty to filling out tax forms. So it's kind of like when I think about different things, different activities, different places to go, I think about how it relates to different aspects of myself. So I think there is like this screening process. I think of myself as this kind of person so there are things that I don't do. I won't run over a cow in a car for fun. So partly that decision process blocks out or eliminates stuff and then sometimes it's used to help guide and make decisions between alternatives."

MS: What do you think is the correlation between the self-congruity theory and customer satisfaction with a product (destination)?

DL: "The problem is that because I have this ability to call up different aspects of myself. It depends on which aspect of myself I want to apply to the situation. So to me if I go on a vacation and I have a good time I explain it by being congruent. It's not I go on a vacation because it's congruent I have a good time."

MS: "So when you find that match with one of your many selves that is what you consider a good match?"

DL: "So it's like I go visit San Luis I have a good time here and the congruity theory came into my selection to try this place. But I don't think it comes into my experience here as much as it comes into my remembrance and my telling other people...and if I know you're a kayaker like me when I come back from San Luis I'm going to tell you about the great kayaking opportunities because when I talk I try to find areas of common interest to talk about. So congruity theory, I'm not sure how much it impacts how much pleasure you have in the experience."

MS: "So you would say it is more the decision process and the after explaining it to others and communicating your experience to others?"

DL: "Right."

Appendix D

Survey Result Tables

1.

Where Traveled?	Europe	Asia	Australia	Africa	North America	Central America	South America
% of Total Responses	85.3	26.5	14.7	20.6	82.4	41.2	26.5

2.

Info Source	Social Media	Word-of-Mouth	Traditional Media	MGC	CGC
% of Total Responses	21.9	68.8	37.5	9.4	50

3.

MGC vs CGC	CGC	MCG	Neither	Both
% of Total Responses	32.4	2.9	41.2	23.5

4.

Self Congruity	Strongly Agree	Somewhat Agree	Slightly Agree	Neutral	Slightly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Strongly Disagree
% of Total Responses	14.7	41.2	17.6	8.8	11.8	2.9	2.9

5.

Dissuade	Crime	Weather	Language Barrier	Not Congruent
% of Total Responses	69.7	12.1	3.0	15.2