

UNDERSTANDING THE ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN DESTINATION MARKETING

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Social media in the context of destination marketing is a growing area of study, and judging by the exponential growth in social networks over recent years, the demand for research will continue. This paper provides a review of the literature to date on social media use by destination marketing organizations (DMOs). A growing number of travellers are influenced by user generated content, presenting a number of challenges and opportunities to DMOs. This review seeks to synthesize existing research, theories and concepts, in order to understand how social media applications are being used by tourism authorities, and to provide a bridge from past research to future success.

Keywords: *social media, travel 2.0, destination marketing*

JEL Classification: *L83, M1, O1*

INTRODUCTION

Social media has become the *modus operandi* of the 21st century. Building on the foundation of Web 2.0, social media applications have facilitated unprecedented growth in human interaction in modern times. To illustrate, Facebook boasted over 175 million users in 2009; fast forward to 2011 and that number is now estimated to be over 500 million active users, 250 million of whom access the application through mobile devices (Facebook, 2011; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Photo and video sharing have also become the norm – “every minute, 10 hours of content were uploaded to the video sharing platform YouTube. The image hosting site Flickr provided access to over 3 billion photographs, making the world-famous Louvre Museum’s collection of 300,000 objects seem tiny

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in comparison” (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010: 59). Twitter reports upwards of 90 million “tweets” per day (TechCrunch, 2010). More recently, the Women’s World Cup managed to draw 7196 tweets per second (Sports Illustrated, 2011). Notably, social media usage is not limited to Generation Y “Boomerang Kids”, but is being increasingly embraced by Generation X and baby boomers (Beresford Research, 2009; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). The world has changed dramatically since the dawn of the Internet, moving from one where a destination could create a web page and use it in the same fashion as one might an online brochure; to one where users generate their own content. The study of social media in the context of destination entities is evolving as researchers seek to better understand what travellers expect and how they behave in the environment of Web 2.0. In effect, our platform for sharing has shifted from one where individuals meet primarily face-to-face to one where people meet online using technology. Moving along this continuum, the future may well consist of travellers meeting via avatars in 3D virtual spaces, though virtual reality’s outlook is only speculative (Guttentag, 2010). With this evolution of the notion of community, certainly there are bound to be challenges to existing business models of destination marketing.

While travel-related communities in the 21st century are shifting, and indeed even the terminology has yet to be standardized, one thing appears certain – Web 2.0 influences travel behaviour and much of the research to date focuses on this aspect. By synthesizing the literature, it is possible to discuss the direction of social media for the future of DMOs.

THE MEANING OF SOCIAL MEDIA

Social media engenders a number of different terms, many of which are used interchangeably, leading authors to concur that the terminology continues to elude sure definition (Cox et al., 2009; Dippelreiter et al., 2008; Fotis, Rossides & Buhalis, 2010; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Xiang and Gretzel, 2010). Terms include *social media*, *user-generated content* (UGC), *consumer generated media* (CGM), *online social networks* (OSN), *social networking sites* (SNS), *Web 2.0* and *Travel 2.0*. O’Reilly (2005) is attributed with coining the term Web 2.0 (Xiang & Gretzel, 2010). Blackshaw, (2006) and more recently Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) have been influential in shaping the terms consumer generated media and social media. Yet, the definitions remain blurred and the technologies to be included under the umbrella of Web 2.0 are still debated (Dippelreiter et al., 2008).

A more ideological concept of social media encompasses the idea of allowing many users internet access for sharing, collaborating, and updating web content. This ideology is rooted in community – users may engage, collaborate and share with others in real time (in the case of virtual and mobile technologies) without constraint of time or geography. O'Reilly (2005) references the internet as a conduit for participation, a consumer-driven medium with ubiquitous reach. The model is one whereby the collective power and collective intelligence drive business – as opposed to government, academia, or commercial enterprise. In other words, content becomes more visible and more powerful with volume.

The notion of “community” has generated a number of different terms including online community, virtual community, virtual worlds, virtual presence, virtual reality, and virtual worlds. Rheingold (1993) is attributed with coining the term virtual community, and formulating the context for social networking. Drawing from sociological and anthropological sources, Rheingold studied different aspects of community and its evolution into worldwide networks. He defines virtual communities as “social aggregations that emerge from the Net when enough people carry on those public discussions long enough, with sufficient human feeling, to form webs of personal relationships in cyberspace” (Rheingold, 1993: X).

Social media generally refers to web applications that allow for the user to post and share content. Common social media applications include Facebook, Twitter, Flickr, and MySpace. Some authors have attempted to classify social media types. For example, Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) organize them into six types: blogs, social networking sites, virtual social worlds, collaborative projects, content communities, and virtual game worlds. Similarly, Fotis et al. (2010) organize social media into four domains: expressing, networking, sharing, and gaming.

User generated content (UGC) is the means by which people use social media; the way they share ideas and collaborate. Examples of the content include the actual photos, blogs, micro blogs and videos that users share publicly. Another term arising out of the literature is consumer generated media (CGM) defined by Blackshaw (2006: p. X) as “media impressions created by consumers, typically informed by relevant experience, and archived or shared online for easy access by other impressionable consumers.”

FROM SEARCHING TO SOCIALIZING

Search engines play a critical role in bringing together the traveller and the tourism supplier. DMOs need to understand how visitors use search engines in order to increase visibility through higher search engine rankings. They must meet the needs of travellers by providing value-added information and services that differentiate themselves from travel agencies and other tourism portals (Xiang, Pan, Law and Fesenmaier, 2010). Additionally, creating an online rapport is critical to increasing visitors to the DMO online presence, requiring information and feedback from social media and tourism portals on what travellers are saying about the destination (Choi et al., 2007; Fotis et al., 2010; Pan & Li, 2011; Xiang & Pan, 2011).

User generated content is quickly becoming *the* source for credible travel information. Though the results are somewhat mixed, the research suggests that travellers perceive UGC to be more trustworthy than information provided by more traditional marketers (Beresford Research, 2009; Cox et al., 2009; Fotis et al., 2010; Gretzel, Kang & Lee, 2008; Gretzel & Yoo, 2008; Lee et al., 2007; Xiang & Gretzel, 2010). The use of blogs and social networking sites is permeating areas that in the past were dominated by traditional suppliers. Social media is becoming the primary medium by which travel information is shared (Xiang & Gretzel, 2010). Search engine results typically show social media sites, with “accommodation” and “transportation” as common key words (Xiang & Pan, 2011).

The opinion of others is becoming the primary vehicle by which the consumer judges the travel product (Gretzel & Yoo, 2008; O’Connor, 2008). Given that travellers engage in social media to satisfy any number of needs – from functional, social, hedonic, to psychological – it stands to reason that DMOs must be prepared to engage travellers (Ling, 2010; Parra-Lopez et al., 2011).

While social media use is a global phenomenon, the use of different applications varies by culture, technological infrastructure, political climate, and media landscape (Gretzel, Kang & Lee, 2008). Perception of risk has been found to influence social media use, as well as the popularity of particular applications. The greater the perceived risk, the greater the tendency to depend on personal networks of family and friends for travel related information (Xiang & Gretzel, 2010). Differences have also been found in information search behaviours by age and gender. Generally females perceive more benefits from using social network sites than do males (Gretzel & Yoo, 2008; Ling, 2010; O’Connor, 2008).

THE IMPORTANCE OF COMMUNITY

With social media, geography is no longer a communication barrier and anonymity is possible making self-disclosure easier than ever before. As such, the paradigm of community has shifted – to one that is global in scope and involves interacting with strangers. Rheingold (1993) derived the term virtual community based on historical notions of community. Traditionally, community and word-of-mouth have been used in the context of familiarity, whereby people knew each other and formed relationships with one another. In the context of the online world, this concept of community has changed to become one where people can meet others around the globe without meeting face-to-face, and interact in new ways.

With the change in the nature of communication and notions of community there has been a change in how travellers gather information and make their travel decisions. Generally, travellers place a high degree of trust in their social media networks – information is gathered and synthesized from other travellers. Knowledge of the travel destination is acquired through social interaction, in addition to traditional market-generated materials and web sites – including DMOs (Beresford Research, 2009; Buhalis & Law, 2008).

A growing trend is the use of mobile devices, from smart phones to Tablet PCs. With advances in technology, portable devices make blogging, photo sharing, and social networking easier for the traveller. An estimated 40% of smart phone users obtain destination related information with these devices (IPK International, 2010; Travel Trade Magazine, 2011). Consumer-centric marketing has taken off, using the Web 2.0 platform to build brand awareness, strengthen brand associations and gain useful insights into traveller behaviours and perceptions of the tourism product (Buhalis & Law, 2008). The power of the tourism product is, more than ever, consumer-driven. Consumers can demand what they want from tourism destinations: their expectations are higher and subsequently they are much more difficult to impress (Buhalis & Law, 2008). Better communication technologies, at the same time, empower suppliers and destinations, allowing for more efficiencies, collaboration and flexibility. What is required is strategic and tactical management to ensure that future opportunities can drive innovation and competitiveness of tourism organizations.

THE PREVALENCE OF NETWORKS AND BLOGS

Social networking sites allow for the consumer to post and share information.

“Social networking sites are applications that enable users to connect by creating personal information profiles, inviting friends, and colleagues to have access to those profiles, and sending e-mails and instant messages between each other. These personal profiles can include any type of information including photos, video, audio files and blogs” (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010: 63).

Social networking depends very much on the concept of word-of-mouth (WOM) or in this case, electronic word of mouth (eWOM) which:

“...involves consumers’ comments about products and services posted on the Internet ...the big difference between WOM and eWOM is that in eWOM, recommendations are typically from unknown individuals with whom strong ties are lacking, so ‘online’ consumers have difficulty in using source similarity to determine the credibility of information” (Bronner & de Hoog, 2011: 15).

Bronner and de Hoog (2011) go on to say that eWOM may in fact be even more influential than WOM given its characteristics of global reach, the speed with which it travels, ease of use, and anonymity, absent of direct face-to-face pressure.

From the DMO supply side, Akoumianakis et al. (2011) conducted a case study on flexible vacation packages using collaborative assembly toolkits and dynamic packaging to package the tourist product through virtual communities of practice. The idea of collective intelligence of communities leverages the collaborative aspect inherent in Web 2.0. The main idea was the creation of an electronic village where tourism partners in a specific destination collaborate to develop products and services for the tourist. The research shows that networks of practice have great potential, enabling tourist entities within a destination to streamline their resources and best practices to meet consumer needs, and travellers benefit, being able to plan a vacation in a time effective and cost effective way. From the demand side perspective, research has examined the role of residents as travel destination information providers. Residents of a destination tend to influence travel planning activities, mostly in the area of food and beverage suggestions, and accommodations. Safety, currency and transportation type issues are found to be driven more by experienced travellers (Arsal et al., 2010).

To leverage eWOM, it is critical to understand what motivates travellers to participate in online communities. The ability to find information easily and quickly influences the degree of participation and the perception users have towards online communities (Chung & Buhalis, 2008; Dippelreiter et al., 2008). Dippelreiter et al. (2008) distinguishes between two types of interactions in the online travel community. One is personal communications where members simply interact and the other is information exchange where members share information for comment by others. The authors conclude that different information needs are sought throughout the trip process, from the stages of trip planning, during the trip, and after the trip.

Other research shows that while many DMOs have added UGC to their websites, fewer have determined the factors that make online travel communities successful (Osti, 2009). Osti (2009) analysed a small mountaineering online community, and found that online communities need to connect with travellers who have similar characteristics in order for sustainable communities to build and endure. While Web 2.0 overcomes geographical challenges, face-to-face interaction opportunities can support the sustainability of virtual communities.

Blogs continue to be one of the most popular forms of user generated content used by destination-oriented organizations. Blogs can be described as “the social media equivalent of personal web pages and can come in a multitude of different variations, from personal diaries describing the author’s life to summaries of all relevant information in one specific content area” (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010: 63). Research suggests that blogs and micro blogs serve a variety of functions in the DMO world. They have been shown to influence travellers’ perceptions – branding takes place as travellers share their experiences and perceptions of a destination (Anfuso, 2006; Yayli et al., 2011). Woodside et al. (2007) also found that blogs played a strong role in branding a destination. Blogs act as a means by which travellers can share their stories. The key elements of a story inherent in blogs include the character, space, product, and experience (Tussyadiah & Fesenmaier, 2010). For the DMO, blogs function as eWOM providing information to the traveller but also providing the conduit by which visitors can identify with the experiences of the blog character.

Volo (2010) studied how travel blogs influence the decision making process of potential travellers to a destination. Traveller blogs describe trips to a destination but may lack the experience or the “essence” component of the trip. The findings showed that while the breadth of eWOM communication through a blog may be apparent, depth is lacking

and therefore their utility as a tool to influence travellers' intentions to visit a destination may be limited (Volo, 2010). This finding is not dissimilar to that found by Wenger (2008); that many blog authors displayed different characteristics than was found in actual visitors. WOM tourism in the past has shown that the message has influence in direct proportion to the authority and credibility of the speaker. Blogs have influenced people to the extent that the reviewers and writers share similar demographic and psychographic characteristics (Wenger, 2008). Strategies that may work include DMOs encouraging specific types of travellers to share their experiences through blogging (e.g. older travellers) and finding relevant blogs (by demographic and specific trip characteristics) linking potential travellers to them through the destination site (Wenger, 2008).

Blogs are equally useful in monitoring visitor attitudes towards a destination (Carson, 2007; Schmalleger & Carson, 2008). By looking at visitor stories and monitoring what guests are saying about destinations, DMOs can collect valuable information concerning the emotional connections visitors make with their destination. The information can provide the DMO with valuable ways of positioning the destination to create value and meaning for future visitors (Woodside et al., 2007). Stories affect people and attract them to destinations while providing them with the ability to fulfill their own personal needs (Woodside et al., 2007). Blogs have the unique ability to show how visitors live out the stories that the destinations evoke for them. How they live out the experience creates the brand promise.

THE FUTURE IN 3D

Virtual reality, virtual presence, and three-dimensional (3D) worlds are relatively new phenomena, representing "computer-based, three-dimensional simulated environments inhabited by avatars in the form of two or 3D graphical representations of humanoids (or other graphical or text-based avatars)" (Kim & Hardin, 2010: 743). Virtual presence, another new term, is defined as "the subjective experience of being in one place or environment, even when one is physically situated in another" (Lee et al., 2010). Strong feelings of presence in a virtual environment have been linked to positive flow experience (Huang et al., 2010). Guttentag (2010) suggests that virtual applications may benefit tourism in a variety of stages, from planning activities, to marketing, to entertainment.

Research of 3D worlds hypothesizes that virtual worlds may soon achieve the same widespread popularity as websites (Pearlman and Gates, 2010). Two questions that arise from the study of virtual reality are, firstly, the level of acceptance visitors will have of the sites as substitutes for the actual tourism product, and secondly, what motivates people to visit these sites. Huang et al. (2010) found that students positive flow experiences correlated strongly with students intention to visit a destination. Quality of these experiences were deemed to be of utmost importance – the factors most influential being ease of navigation in the world, skill level to handle tasks presented in the world, and feelings of presence in the world (Huang et al., 2010). Lee et al. (2010) found that mental images contributed to visitors' feelings of being virtually present in a destination – that is, visitors attitude is strongly shaped by feelings of virtual presence. The closer the virtual presence is to reality, the more likely web site visitors are to become real visitors.

An opportunity arising from the use of virtual worlds is the increased potential of positive eWOM communication (Kim & Hardin, 2010). Given that the interaction is second only to physical face-to-face communication, problems and inquiries from travellers can be dealt with immediately and directly, thereby increasing the opportunity for positive feedback and hence, positive eWOM. In summary, though the research generally finds that pervasive environments have an impact on tourist decision making processes (Pantano & Servidio, 2011), the awareness and acceptance of using virtual applications is still in its infancy, and requires high levels of technical support to function effectively.

UNDERLYING THEORIES AND CONCEPTS

To address the elusiveness of social media terminology, a number of theories and concepts have been related to its understanding. Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) created a classification scheme based on the theories of media richness, social presence, and social processes (self-presentation, self-disclosure) – what they argue to be the foundation of social media.

The theory of social presence suggests that the higher the degree of social presence, the greater social influence communicators have on one another's behaviour (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Social presence, in the online environment, is gained by media richness. Media richness theory (Daft & Lengel, 1986) assumes that the goal of any communication is the "resolution of ambiguity and the reduction of uncertainty" (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010: 61). Media differ in the degree of richness they possess,

resulting in some media being more effective than others (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010).

The theory of self-presentation and self-disclosure is also relevant here – virtual worlds allowing for high levels of social presence and self-presentation (for example, with an avatar one can present oneself physically in almost any way one wishes). In the context of a virtual world the user can mimic the face-to-face world, and beyond. In terms of self-presentation, in the real world one will try to reveal information which is consistent with the image one gives. In the virtual world the user can project a certain image by how they communicate, and, by whatever physical image they wish. How images in a virtual world influence propensity to travel is complex, and requires much further research to comprehend.

In the Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) classification, applications such as collaborative projects (e.g. Wikipedia) and blogs score lowest, as they are typically text-based simple exchanges. Content communities (e.g. YouTube) and social networking sites (e.g. Facebook) score in the middle of the scheme, reflecting their facility to share pictures, videos, and other forms of media. On the highest level are virtual games and social worlds (e.g. Second Life), which mimic dimensions of face-to-face interactions. In terms of self-presentation and self-disclosure, blogs score higher than collaborative projects given their expansive content in contrast to specific projects. Social networking sites are again in the middle, given their facility for self-disclosure, and virtual social worlds are ranked highest (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Studies that reference these theories, and others, as fundamental to our understanding of the social media phenomenon, are listed in Table 1.

Word-of-mouth (WOM)

Word-of-mouth, and now eWOM, is a concept frequently found at the foundations of social media dialogue. The power of WOM was not only recognized as far back in time as Aristotle, but has been shown to influence consumer behaviour, attitudes, intentions, awareness, expectations and perceptions (Buttle, 1998). Studies have shown WOM to be nine times as effective as advertising in changing consumer perception of a product or service (Buttle, 1998). WOM, defined by Arndt (1967) who was one of the first to examine consumer behaviour in the context of WOM, is “oral, person-to-person communication between a receiver and a communicator whom the receiver perceives as non-commercial, regarding a brand, product or service” (Buttle, 1998: 242).

Buttle also refers to Stern (1994), who describes WOM as: “WOM involves the exchange of ephemeral oral or spoken messages between a contiguous source and a recipient who communicate directly in real life” (Buttle, 1998: 242; Stern, 1994: 7).

Flow theory

The concept of flow is built around the idea of an optimal state of interaction between people and their environment, and has been referred to as the process of “optimal experience” (Novak et al., 2000), and as a “holistic sensation that people feel when they act with total involvement” (Csikszentmihalyi, 1991). Building from the concept of flow, Hoffman and Novak (1996) proposed a model of consumer navigation in an online environment to help explain the person/computer interaction (Novak et al., 2000). Hausman and Siekpe (2009) determined that consumers’ intention to re-visit a website and purchase from that website was directly related to the perceived level of flow. Positive flow experience in the online context influences visitors’ engagement levels, and influences attitude and behaviours among users (Huang et al., 2010). The time people commit to social media suggests the presence of flow.

Table 1 Theories and concepts underlying social media

Theories and concepts	Reference
Media richness theory Social presence theory Self-presentation theory	Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010
Information processing Consumer-decision making Schema theory Consumer decision-making model	Choi, Lehto & O’leary, 2007 Cox, Burgess, Sellitto & Buultjens, 2009
Perspectives on the online tourism domain: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Industry perspective • Symbolic representation perspective • Travel behaviour perspective • Travel information search perspective 	Xiang & Gretzel, 2010
Information search behaviour <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Internal search External search 	Lee, Soutar & Daly, 2007
Tourism Destination image (visitors’ overarching impression of a place) Power-law distribution	Pan and Li, 2011

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Structured approach • Unstructured approach 	
Mental model Persuasion Process	Xiang & Pan, 2011
Netnography Balance theory	Woodside, Cruikshank and Dehuang, 2007
Brain-computer interface research (BCI) Immersive systems Presence	Guttentag, 2010
Environmental psychology and service marketing research Servicescape Information Systems Theory	Kim & Hardin, 2010
Information theory	O'Connor, 2010
Flow theory	Huang, Backman & Backman, 2010

IMPLICATIONS FOR DMO'S

Based on this literature review, there are a number of implications for DMOs. Preponderantly, the research suggests that social media influences travel. People who use social media do so not only to find pertinent information, but also as a means of socializing with others and for enjoyment purposes. One of the benefits of social media from the supplier side is that DMOs can collaborate and streamline their information, adding value for consumers, while building their brand through direct interaction with the consumer, and immediate response to consumer queries and concerns. Consumers, on the other hand, benefit by receiving what they perceive as more authentic information based on the experience of other travellers, and can design their trips to reflect more closely what they are looking for by interacting with both experienced travellers and residents of a destination.

Blog usage continues to grow. Volo (2010) found that blogs are frequently shared with friends and family and do influence how a travel destination is perceived. Listening and engaging travellers are now critical to DMO success. With ever-increasing volume, information needs to be continually tracked and managed, to identify and address potential problems to mitigate damaging effects of negative eWOM, and to build brand messages that positively connect with consumers. Blogs and story narratives can be effective eWOM tools that influence traveller decisions.

Conversely, descriptive blogs often lack the experience or essence of a trip, but may still be useful for data collection, and to help DMOs to create blogs with more depth and breadth. More research is also needed to understand cross-cultural differences in the context of blogging.

A criticism of DMOs is that they only present the positive points of a destination. Most travellers today are well educated and aware that DMOs focus on marketing and promoting their destination. If the DMO viewpoint is perceived as overly biased, travellers will seek out the experience of more “objective” sources through alternative social media sites. Exploring blogs is a means by which the traveller can search a range of information until they feel satisfied that their destination knowledge is acceptably accurate. Volo (2010) found that return visitors were the largest audience for the DMO blog, and that these blogs were extremely positive in nature (which may have been influenced by the prize incentive for the best blog). Interestingly, the study findings followed the 80/20 rule, whereby 80% of the blog content was posted by 20% of bloggers. Seeking to understand the active blogger segment would provide useful information for the DMO. Functional, social and psychological needs are at play, as is trust and customer loyalty. Loyalty is dependent on social interaction and the quality of information provided. Thus, content of social media and online tourism communities continues to play a vital role in the virtual world, with added emphasis required to meet the need for social interaction. Technology serves as the mediator of the experience, and it is now going mobile. In the Web 2.0 environment, images, video, stories and avatars create opportunity for people to share and strengthen the travel experience, pre, during, and post trip.

CONCLUSIONS

The literature review indicates that while the “buzz” of social media is certainly influencing how travellers make their travel decisions, the concept is not yet fully defined; perhaps understandable given that Web 2.0 is a relatively new paradigm. Themes emerging from the literature include the shift from content search to social interaction, the concept of community, and the evolution to mobile and virtual environments. Much of the literature is built from the theoretical foundations of social presence, flow theory, and the concept of word-of-mouth. All are connected in the virtual space, as eWOM provides social presence, and can induce flow, suggesting a powerful combination for DMO marketers mandated to influence traveller behaviour. In conclusion, the major findings of this review may be summed up as follows:

- Social media is not clearly defined; the concept is relatively new and the associated terms are evolving as academics and practitioners come to understand human behaviour in the context of the online environment.
- Travellers use social media to help plan their trips; this trend is growing. Social media plays a significant role in the information search and how that information is used is influenced by age, gender, culture and other demographic and sociographic characteristics.
- Social networking sites influence travel decisions; users generally participate in these communities to find information, for social interaction, as well as, for personal enjoyment.
- Blogs are one of the most popular forms of social media both in terms of branding a destination and influencing travellers' decisions to visit a particular place.
- Travellers trust WOM communications more so than traditional marketing; given that eWOM is anonymous (fostering greater self-disclosure than WOM) and global (reaches out to many people at the same time), its influence may well be even greater than that of traditional WOM.
- User adoption of mobile technologies is growing significantly; there is also a growing interest in the area of virtual world applications.
- Research into 3D virtual technologies has gained attention in the literature and findings suggest that this experience may influence the attitudes and perceptions of visitors towards a place. However, adoption appears to be somewhat slow as a certain degree of technical support is required to maintain and develop these types of applications.

Based on this review, further research would be merited in a number of areas. Collaborative efforts involving multi stakeholders within a destination holds promise for the future both in economic terms and for increasing brand visibility. Virtual game worlds are increasing in popularity and merit further research. Finally, 3D virtual worlds as a potential substitute for some tourism products would benefit with further exploration, as would the area of mobile technologies. These applications represent the future of tourism, and the future of destination marketing organizations. On a global scale, social media use is growing, and the challenge is for destination marketing organizations to effectively choose not only which applications to use, but also to identify what consumers want from their sites and what elements to include in the site that will

most effectively influence the traveller decision making process, socially, virtually, and authentically.

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