



## Motivations for sharing tourism experiences through social media



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### HIGHLIGHTS

- Altruistic and community-related motivations are most relevant for information sharing.
- Motivational factors differ depending on type of content and type of social media.
- Social networks allowing audience control are most popular for online sharing.
- Tourists prefer sharing visual content above narrative/textual content.
- There is low 'real-time' use of social media for holiday content sharing.

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### ABSTRACT

Social media are increasingly relevant as part of tourism practices affecting destinations and businesses. Based on a destination-specific survey, this study charts and explores summer holidaymakers' motivations for social media contributions and their willingness to share content through various social media. The findings in relation to the much-visited destination of Mallorca offer an understanding of the adoption of tourist social media in technologically-advanced markets with high levels of ICT use. The results provide insights into such motivational factors as personal and community-related benefits as well as the social capital that influences a sharing of user-generated content. The study reveals a dominance of visual content, along with the relevance of altruistic and community-related motivations and motivational differences between types of content creators. Sharing practices through social media appear as valuable articulations of sociability and emotional support, while having lesser relevance as information sources for holiday decision-making. The paper additionally shows the extent to which old and new technologies overlap and complement each other.

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### 1. Introduction

Advances in the Internet and social media are changing the many ways that information about leisure travel and its experiences are disseminated. Social media platforms permit tourists to digitise and share online knowledge (Buhalis & Law, 2008; Volo, 2010), emotions and experiential moments (Jacobsen & Munar, 2012) far more widely than in the past. Contributions are elicited for review sites (Streitfeld, 2011) and virtual communities are being created that permit novel forms of social interaction (Kozinets, 1999). These developments transform what previously were mainly private and commonly undisclosed experiences shared only within small circles of acquaintances that were characterised by

mutual trust into global databases of consumer information that can be managed and analysed by tourism firms and organisations. Moreover, Web-based platforms allow for 'real-time' recording and sharing of tourism experiences and thereby add to advances of personal virtual identities (Munar, 2010). This is further supported by the ubiquitous availability of Internet access in most European holiday destinations.

Understanding the effects of various social media support systems is regarded as a top-priority tourism research topic (Williams, Stewart, & Larsen, 2011). Some studies have examined the effect of user-generated content in tourism (e.g. Fotis, Buhalis, & Rossides, 2012; Jacobsen & Munar, 2012; Litvin, Goldsmith, & Pan, 2008; Xiang & Gretzel, 2010; Ye, Law, & Gu, 2009), while those factors motivating tourist involvement in social media have received less attention (Berger & Schwartz, 2011; Bronner & de Hoog, 2011; Yoo & Gretzel, 2011). Further, limitations of previous studies on motivation for creation of user-generated content (UGC) in tourism contexts include the dominance of a single methodological approach,

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that is, online questionnaires distributed to online communities. While demographic factors are usually accounted for, information on travel types and specific destinations is relevant (e.g. Ryan & Glendon, 1998) and frequently lacking (e.g. Huang, Basu, & Hsu, 2010; Yoo & Gretzel, 2011). The prevalent empirical approaches concentrate on travellers who are already active online users and have e-literacy skills. However, there are considerable inequalities in web adoption and use, as well as content creation (Hargittai, 2004; Hargittai & Walejko, 2008).

This paper contributes to the understanding of tourists' social media adoption in technologically advanced nations with high levels of information and communication technologies' (ICT) adoption and use, in relation to a holiday location that is generally well-known in Western Europe and visited by numerous people from virtually all social strata. Through the utilisation of an *en route* (exit) survey approach in a specific, mature and mainstream destination, the present study acknowledges the possible relevance of digital divides and destination types in analyses of holidaymaker-sharing practices. The study thus aims at expanding the knowledge of this emergent field and it presents unique insights into tourist motivations for contributing to such social media as social network sites and review sites. The main objectives of this article are to:

1. Provide empirical evidence of motivations for contributing to social media content creation and sharing
2. Examine the profiles of tourists who create and share online content
3. Analyse where and when tourists share online content, and what type of content is shared
4. Examine the relationship between motivational factors, social media types and type of content (visual versus narrative content)
5. Contribute to expanding the knowledge base on technological mediation and emerging tourism cultures in the context of countries with high levels of information and communication technologies adoption and use.

## 2. Literature review

### 2.1. Sharing practices in tourism social media

While previous studies have scrutinised knowledge sharing practices in virtual communities (Hsu, Ju, Yen, & Chang, 2007), this study expands the construct of knowledge sharing to encompass the overall sharing of tourism experiences. In social media, tourists share not only knowledge, they typically also share experiences. A tourism experience can be defined as "an individual's subjective evaluation and undergoing (i.e., affective, cognitive, and behavioural) of events related to his/her tourist activities that begins before (i.e., planning and preparation), during (i.e., at the destination), and after the trip (i.e., recollection)" (Tung & Ritchie, 2011:1369). Experiences are personal and depend on how individuals perceive and react to specific tourism places and products (e.g. destinations, attractions, and accommodation). The sharing of experiences includes not only knowledge-related aspects such as facts about holiday attributes (e.g. prices, weather conditions, beaches and other attractions) but may additionally include communicating emotions, imaginations and fantasies about features of a holiday, for example through photographs, emoticons and other linguistic markers in online communication (Baym, 2010). Research has also shown that advice on practical matters and embodied feelings of comfort or discomfort are relevant in online reviews of tourism attractions (Munar & Ooi, 2012). The perceptions and knowledge of tourism are conceived not simply along the

spatial activity of actually visiting places; it is equally shaped by experiences of mediated, simulated, and imagined space (Campbell, 2005) as also by touristic objects such as souvenirs (Haldrup & Larsen, 2010) and postcards (Knebel, 1960). Social media provide new channels for the production and circulation of meaning in tourism experiences and imaginations.

#### 2.1.1. Real-time sharing

Tourists can create and share their experiences online over different time horizons (Berger & Schwartz, 2011). The expansion of new media and mobile technologies increases the possibility of real-time experience sharing and encourages synchronic communication types (Bødker & Browning, 2012; Litvin et al., 2008; Qualman, 2009; Shih, 2009). Increasingly, not only telephone calls but also real-time electronic media such as short message services (SMS) allow tourists to maintain relationships while away on holiday. Tourists may thus gain a sense of real-time integration into home events by initiating messages about their experiences by texting, sending photographs/video by phone, using email and posting on Internet sites (White & White, 2007).

#### 2.1.2. Social media types

Web 1.0 refers to the first stage of development of the World Wide Web when websites were not yet providing interactive and user-generated content. The evolution of Web 1.0 is known as Web 2.0 or social media. Social media adopt many different forms. Popular types are wikis (e.g. Wikitravel), blogs (e.g. Travelblog) and microblogs (e.g. Twitter), social network sites (e.g. Facebook), media-sharing sites (e.g. Flickr, YouTube), review sites (e.g. TripAdvisor) and voting sites (e.g. Digg). These types differ in levels of enabled social interactivity, temporal structure and reach of communication, amount of social cues and context richness (e.g. information about personal identities and spatial/environmental contexts), as well as levels of hierarchy and control established by site administrators (Baym, 2010; Munar & Jacobsen, 2013). Social network sites usually provide social cues that are richer than that found in other types of platforms such as review sites or media-sharing sites. Here one can distinguish between private and public sharing, on platforms that allow the users to tailor communication reach. For example, tourists can choose between making their content available to all web users, their friends, or specific groups/individuals. It has been shown that types of social media are relevant to tourists' involvement and use (Jacobsen & Munar, 2012).

#### 2.1.3. Textual versus visual content

Tourism as sightseeing is deeply related to image-making media (e.g. Beeton, 2004) and this is to some degree also the case for holidaymaking such as relaxation in seaside resorts (e.g. Barthes, 1993). While information sharing is commonly related to textual and narrative communicative practices (e.g. blogs and written reviews), the sharing of experiences specifically acknowledges creation and sharing of (audio)-visual content online. Photographs or short videos sent from mobile phones act increasingly as the new postcard (Munar & Jacobsen, 2013). While producers of visual content commonly have been motivated by the ludic passing of time, producers of narrative content prefer to disseminate information (Stoeckl, Rohrmeier, & Hess, 2007).

### 2.2. Motivations for sharing online-content

#### 2.2.1. Individual action and personal cognition

Social cognitive theory has been used to understand consumer behaviour and typically presupposes that individual actions in specific environments are based on personal cognition (Hsu et al., 2007). A person's cognition is said to depend on self-efficacy and

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