The Effect of Feedback within Social Media in Tourism Experiences

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Abstract. Recent research indicates that travellers are actively using social media in soliciting feedback from their friends and others before, during and after their trip. However, the impact of this feedback is not clear in terms of how the use of social media mediates the touristic experience. As such, the goal of this study is to identify how social media enable tourists to access their social networks and the mechanisms in which the use of social media shapes tourist's perceptions and emotions during their trip. Using a web-based experiment, this study confirmed that social media such as Facebook has the potential to significantly affect tourists' emotions and thus, improve the tourism experience.

Keywords: Tourism experience, social media, travel, Facebook.

1   Introduction

The tourism experience plays a central role in influencing satisfaction levels and intention to recommend, and as such, tourism marketers (and researchers) are trying to understand the meanings and experiential qualities of tourism offerings [1]. Recent research argues that the tourism experience is determined by the relationship between tourists and their collective world view, and it is based on the location and activities with respect to the society to which they belong [2][3]. Importantly, a study by Lewis, Pea and Rosen [4] indicates that tourists' use of social media dramatically changes how travellers see and experience a place because, as tourists, they can 'share' their journey and other people 'can see' tourists' footsteps across previously socially defined boundaries through time and space. Though this research does not explicitly identify the role of social media, many related tourism studies suggest that social media has improved efficiency in travel decision-making and marketing strategy [5]. Interestingly, however, these studies have not considered the processes of the tourism experience in terms of the factors that impede and/or enhance the creation of meaningful experiences and, therefore, the ability of travellers to create new meanings of place and activities [6].

It is argued in this study that the tourism experience is largely based upon the social construction of the experience rather than the physical aspects comprising the

setting [2][7]. This is not to say that physical environment such as scenery, attractions and culture, and personal characteristics are not vital to the touristic experience. However viewed through a "collective" lens, it is argued that shared behaviours and social/cultural activities facilitate interpretation of other components within the social context [8]. Recent research focusing on the user processes of social media indicate that feedback play an important role in shaping the meaning through sharing activities [9]. However, it is unclear from this research how (and the extent to which) social media supports users in obtaining feedback as compared to private media (such as text messages). Thus, goal of this study is to identify how social media enable tourists to access their social networks and the mechanisms in which the use of social media shapes tourist's perceptions and emotions during their trip.

2   Conceptual Development

The tourism experience is situated within the tourist environment, which in turn, sets the stage whereby tourists mentally and/or physically interact within the setting in order to create meaningful experiences [10][5] and that, while no two experiences are exactly the same, it is argued that the tourism experience can be understood as a reflective series of sensory, emotional, cognitive, behavioural and social outcomes [11]. However, social media enable tourists to share their experiences almost instantly, and as such, we need to consider it as a significant mediator of the tourism experience [12]; that is, it is argued that social media use plays important and differing roles in shaping each stage of the tourism experience: 1. Ambient awareness, 2. Active awareness, 3. Interpretation, and two types of meaning making (i.e. Meaning making 1and 2). Thus, it argued that as a whole, the objectives and underlying social media activities could be understood within the experience creation process as illustrated in Figure 1.

   Based on the conceptual model presented in Fig. 1, this study focused on the role of social media in shaping the on-site tourism experience; more specifically, this study examines the effect of feedback through social media on experience interpretation. There is much speculation about the effects of online social interaction and its potential outcomes and social media has been described as a "stage'' where feedback to individuals' performance contributes to their psychoanalytic benefits [13]. Thus, research on online social interaction allows a more thorough investigation of the feedback's effects on receiver's perception in that social media raises the possibility that tourist's can interpret environmental stimuli as well as feedback from others in public media settings. In particular, this research suggests that receiving positive feedback from others on social media positively effects one's satisfaction and feelings of acceptance [14][9]. This research also demonstrates that there are significant positive relationships between feedback and participation frequency [15] and quality [16]. From this research, it is posited that people seek to support both global self-conceptions and context-dependent identities through social interaction. And, when individuals receive disconfirming feedback, which creates incongruity
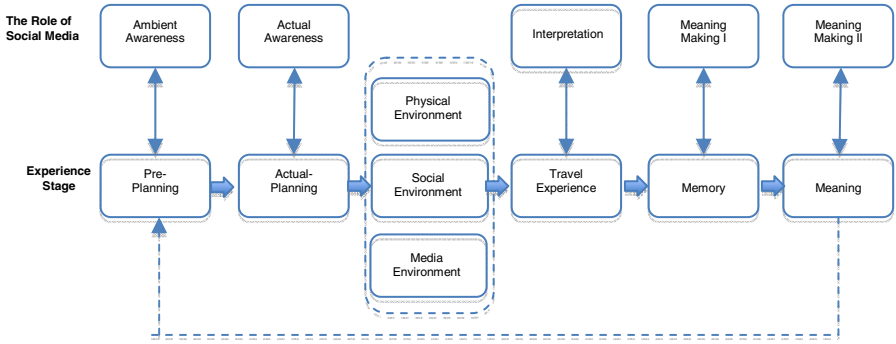
Fig. 1. The Role of Social Media in the Touristic Experience

between self-directed behavior and the responses of others, it generates negative emotions and encourages them to pursue one or more of the strategies to overcome these situations [17].

Although many destination marketing organizations (DMOs) and tourism-related companies have consider the impact of social media, there have been a limited number of studies that have examined how social media shapes one's travel experience. Unlike traditional media such as TV and newspaper, the contents of social media are socially constructed and as such, can be used as information sources, decision supporters and an online sense of community [18][19]. In the tourism context, for example, intended audiences of travel blogs or social networking sites such as Facebook are mainly friends and families [20]. Importantly, tourism experiences are not a singular event, but a continuous creative process [5] where tourists derive meaningful experiences from interacting with place and peoples throughout the whole journey. Recent research by Tussyadiah and Fesenmaier [21] indicates that when tourists use social media during the trip, their temporal and spatial dimensions are expanded. Further, Wang, Park and Fesenmaier [22] argue that when travellers share their experiences online they might choose to participate in different activities, which, in turn, changes the overall travel experience. They found that when tourists' exchanges texts, photos and video through social media they gain access to 'social presence.' However, the study of stories and feedback in tourism research largely has been limited to face-to-face interaction. For example, Arnould & Price [10] and Huang & Hsu [23] examined how travel companions, fellow tourists and service providers are sources of instant feedback. However, the increasing access to mobile and immersive social media has opened a much wider range of potential channels for psychological involvement and behavioural interaction for tourist. Further, recent research on social media suggests the hedonic use of social media is quite different from the use of more conventional information technology. As compared to telephone, text-message, and email (which can be regarded more as a private media), social media enables both private and public communication system

to users [24]. For example, Facebook has a public communication system called ''The Wall,'' where can be viewed by public and user has less control about the common activities between ''friends" - unless they stop using the [24]. It is argued that this might play a particularly important role in valence of communicative actions because social media open the public sphere for the people. For example, the users of social media use the technology to present themselves to others and share their thought and emotions. Furthermore, users of social media become aware of the presence of their audience and their feedback [14] and users tailor their self-presentation based on these expiated outcomes [25].

Based upon this literature, it is argued that tourist's emotions and experiences may be heavily influenced by interacting with friends and others via social media whereby the valence of the feedback and different types of feedback shape tourism experiences. As such, the following two research hypotheses define this study:

- *H1:* Tourists' emotions and experiences will differ significantly based upon the valence (i.e., positive, negative, and none) of social media feedback.
- *H2:* Tourists' emotions and experiences will differ significantly in terms of private media (one-to-one text message) and social media.

3   Methodology

The above research questions were empirically tested using a between-subjects experimental design tested the impact of types of feedback(positive, vs. negative vs. feedback) and types of communication media (private media vs. social media)on tourists' emotions and experience. In particular, the experiment used a hypothetical travel setting whereby each subject was asked to read:

"Imagine that you are taking a pleasure trip to a sky resort in Europe. The weather is great and you are enjoying the amazing views from the top of the snowy mountain. You want to share this moment with your family and friends."

Following this message, they also were exposed to a 64 seconds long description (i.e., a revolving set of photographs of the trip). After watching, respondents were randomly presented one of following conditions:

- Group 1: Text message & No feedback
- Group 2: Text message & Positive feedback
- Group 3: Text message & Negative feedback
- Group 4: Facebook & No feedback
- Group 5: Facebook & Positive feedback
- Group 6: Facebook & Negative feedback

For both private media and social media condition, subjects were asked to read a short description of the communication media and then exposed to a screen shot of each condition (e.g., "Please imagine that you are trying to send a text message to your friend (Fig. 2). There is no need to worry about how much data you're using."). After

each condition, different types of feedback were also manipulated with short descriptions and screenshot (e.g., "You know that your status has been posted on your Facebook wall. However, you haven't received any feedback (e.g. like, comment) after six hours."). Then, subjects in all six conditions were asked questions regarding their emotional states, tourism experiences and finally demographics. Emotions were measured based upon the Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS) developed by Watson, Clark and Tellegen [26] positive emotions and negative emotions were measured using 13-items. Tourism experiences were measured using four items based on Hosany and Gilbert [1]. All items used a 5-point Likert-type scale.

One hundred eighty one subjects were recruited online through Amazon's Mechanical Turk (http://www.mturk.com)[27]. The sample comprised 98 men (53.8%) and 83 women (45.6) (cell sizes ranged from 28 to 32). Participation was restricted to residents of the United States and to those persons that are at least 18 years old. Most subjects are 25 to 44 year olds (68.2%).
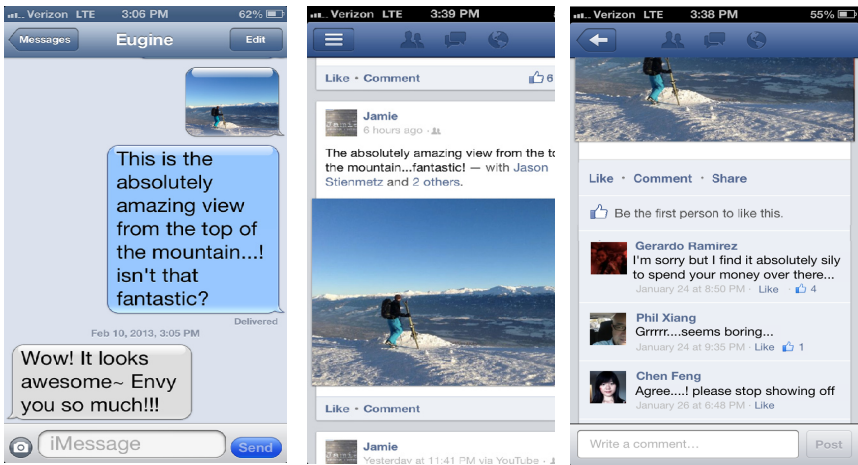
Fig. 2.   Text message/Positive   Socia lmedia/ No   Social media/Negative
                Feedback   Feedback   Feedback

4   Results

Analyses were conducted using ANOVA to examine the main effect of different types of feedback on tourists' emotions. As can be seen in Figures 3 and 4, the results were highly significant both positive emotion (F $(2,178)=60.966$, $p<0.01$) and negative emotion(F $(2,178)=78.342$, $p<0.01$). Interestingly for both positive and negative emotional states, no feedback was also considered differently. In other words, participants who received positive feedback were more likely to show positive emotional states than not receiving any feedback or negative feedback from their friends. There were also significant interaction effects with whether the communication

channel they used are private media or social media (F_{pos} (2,178=16.303, p<0.01) ; F_{neg} (2,178=30.174, p<0.01)). As shown in Figures 3 and 4, the different types of media moderate the relationship between feedback valence and emotional states. More specifically, as compared to private media (defined as a text message in this study), social media plays stronger mediating role.

Further analyses using ANOVA were conducted to test the impact of both positive and negative emotion on the tourism experience. The result shows that there is positive relationship between positive emotion and the tourism experience (r=.131, p<0.01). However, the relationship between negative emotion and the tourism experience was not statistically significant; this finding of no significant association between negative emotion and the tourism experience could be related to the settings of this study in that the social environment as defined by feedback from other people may not be the dominant factor shaping the tourism experience.
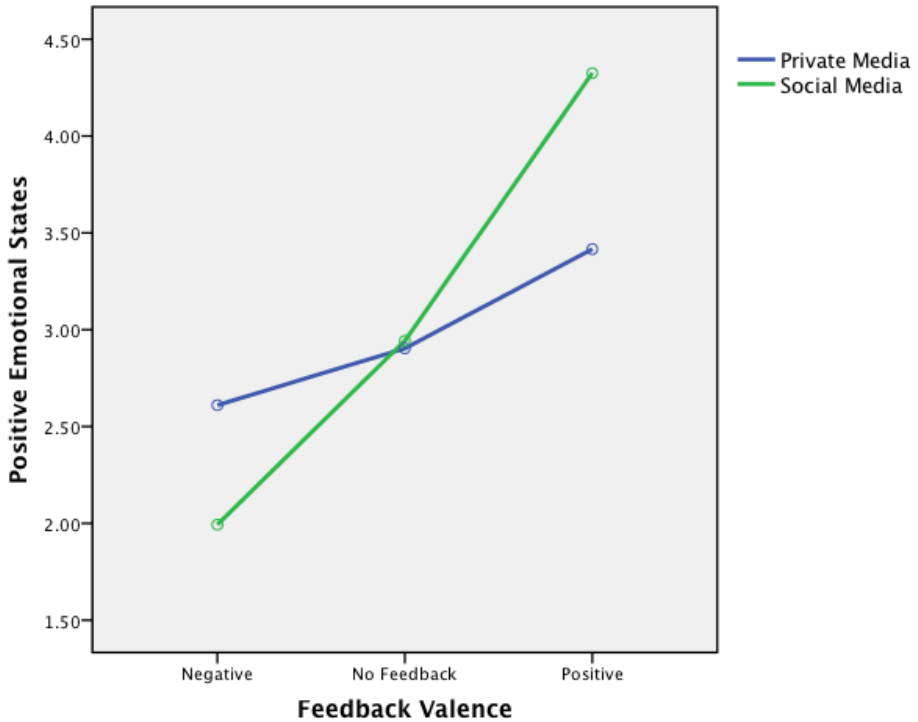

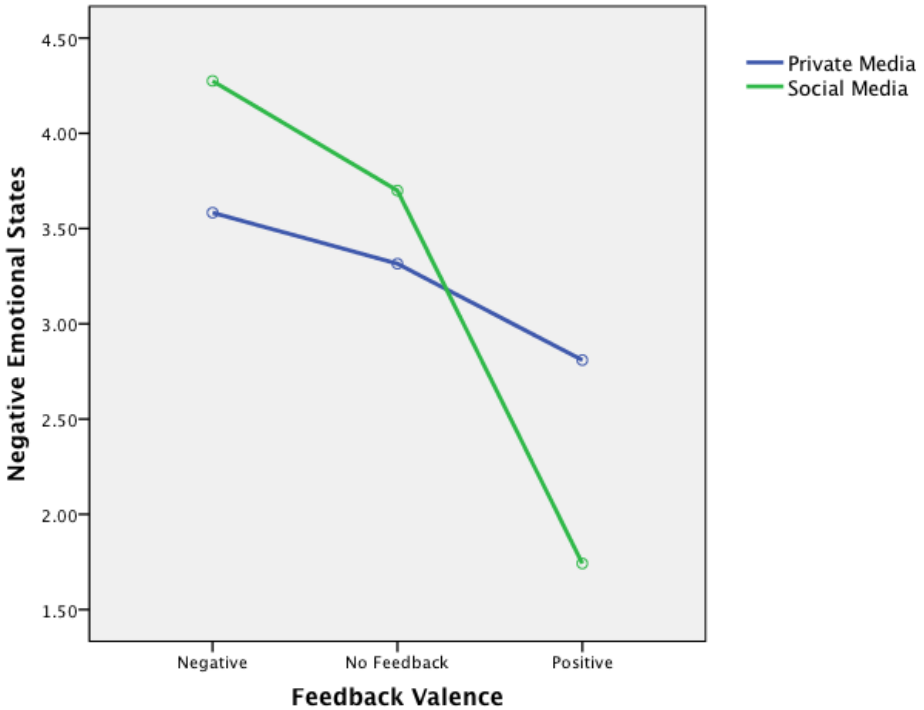**Fig. 3.** Interaction plot for positive emotion

Fig. 4. Interaction plot for negative emotion

5   The References Section

The goal of this study was to assess the role of social media (in particular, the role of feedback within public and private media) in shaping the tourism experience. The results of the study confirm that social media-enabled communication with pre-existing social network significantly affects tourists' emotions and therefore the tourism experience. That is, subjects appear to place heavier weight in the either positive or negative feedback conditions where their communicative activities are observable. Social media provides important emotional and cognitive cues enabling tourists create and recreate meaningful tourism experiences.

Our study extends previous research in the area of the tourism experience research by investigating the role of tourists' communication with pre-existing social networks and tourists' emotions. Tourists could have more enjoyable and memorable tourism experiences if they acquire positive emotional support during trip. We add social media as a strong driver to facilitate instant story sharing and emotional exchange. It is logical, therefore, to speculate about the nature of the relationship between emotions and types of media. However, our study focused on positive and negative emotions as well as one types of social media. Further research should extend the spectrum of emotions and investigate whether positive and negative emotions compensate each other or negative emotions dominate positive emotions, as stated by

Izard [27]. In addition, we need to consider number (frequency and people) and strength of communication in social media setting through various types of social media. Finally, the results from this study are encouraging for the success of affective computing as they suggest that users will show more positive emotions with various computer mediated communication media. Thus, from practical perspective, these results identify a range of potential opportunities for tourism business to more effectively exploit the paradigm shift happening right now to create tourism experiences. Since this is an exploratory study, there are few strong conclusions, and many limitations.

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