Social Media in Urban Tourism

Impact on Information Search and Spatial Behavioural Patterns

Fanny Raab

1 Background

Background

- Growing importance of user-generated content in tourism (e.g. Xiang & Gretzel 2010)
- Supply side: democratisation of distribution, Long Tail theory (Anderson 2004): niches have become more important
- Demand side: tourist interest in niches has been growing, phenomenon of the “new tourist” (Poon 1993; Maitland & Newman 2009)

Trail of ants vs. New tourists

Majority of travelers still encountered on trail of ants (Keul & Kühberger 1996)

Interested in discovering authentic and unique places away from the main tourist paths abseits der (Feifer 1985; Poon 1993; Maitland & Newman 2009)
2. Aim of the study

Main research question:

- Can the *tourist 2.0*, i.e., the tourist, who uses the internet and especially the social web as an information source, also be met on the trail of ants? Or is tourists’ appropriation of destinations becoming more and more differentiated as a result of an increasing importance of tips and recommendations that are tailored individually to each traveller’s needs? And what role do niche offers play thereby?

Research objectives

I. To establish the importance that the social web has for urban travellers and to find out in what way social media are used by them

II. To establish the impact that an increased social web use has on urban tourists and their behaviour when at the destination
3 Methodology

Face-to-face-survey

- **period**: June – September 2010
- **basic population**: 14-35-year old urban tourists
- **sampling procedure**: convenience sample
- **sample size**: 1,079

Case study cities: selection criteria

- **Diversity**: apart from the well-known sights in the city centre there are numerous interesting places away from the tourist paths to discover
- **High importance in European city tourism**: all three metropolises currently register more than five million tourist arrivals annually
- **Young tourists** represent an important target group for the three cities: at least one third of all visitors are younger than 35 years old
- **Repeat visitors** play an important role for the respective cities: they represent at least half of all visitors.

Case study cities

- **Visit Berlin**: 356 respondents
- **I amsterdam**: 350 respondents
- **Visit London**: 373 respondents
4 Results of the study

4.1 The importance of the social web as a travel information source

Travel information sources

(n=1,079, multiple answers possible)

- internet: 75.0%
- friends/relatives: 47.1%
- guide books: 39.9%
- brochures/catalogues: 12.3%
- travel agency/tour operator: 7.1%
- newspapers and magazines: 6.0%
- official destination website: 5.8%
- TV and radio: 3.7%
- other: 3.4%

Use of social media for the city trip

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>social networks</th>
<th>review portals</th>
<th>travel communities</th>
<th>video portals</th>
<th>blogs</th>
<th>photo communities</th>
<th>microblogs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>used a lot</td>
<td>15.4</td>
<td>14.3</td>
<td>8.2</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>2.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>used a little</td>
<td>21.7</td>
<td>30.8</td>
<td>23.9</td>
<td>17.4</td>
<td>19.0</td>
<td>15.3</td>
<td>6.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>not used at all</td>
<td>61.1</td>
<td>50.6</td>
<td>63.3</td>
<td>76.5</td>
<td>74.7</td>
<td>77.3</td>
<td>87.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>don't know</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>4.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

source: own survey 2010
Social media: searched topics

(n=727, multiple answers possible)

- **Sights**: 56.4%
- **Accommodation**: 48.4%
- **Transportation**: 47.5%
- **Nightlife**: 37.0%
- **Art & Culture**: 24.6%
- **Events**: 20.8%
- **Insider Tips**: 18.6%
- **Attractions off the beaten path**: 15.4%
- **Gastronomy**: 15.8%
- **Other**: 3.6%

Source: Own survey 2010

The social web as an information source – most important results (1)

- **Applications**: review sites, social networks and travel communities most popular
- **Topics**: sights
- **Practical information**: accommodation, transportation
- **Quality assessment**: little interest in niche offers
- **Point in time**: before the trip
- **Advantages**: convenience, diversity
- **Authenticity, personal experiences**

The social web as an information source – most important results (2)

- **Travellers**: Asians, South Americans very active
  - Germans more reserved
  - On average slightly older
- **Trip characteristics**: greater length of stay
  - No difference between first-time and repeat visitors
  - Often solo travellers

4.2 The impact of tourists' social web use on their behaviour
Activities and social web use

(1 = very high importance, 5 = no importance)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Social networks users</th>
<th>Blogs</th>
<th>Video sites</th>
<th>Photo communities</th>
<th>Review sites</th>
<th>Travel communities</th>
<th>Microblogs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>to see the most important sights</td>
<td>users: 2.04</td>
<td>1.96</td>
<td>1.97</td>
<td>1.96</td>
<td>1.94*</td>
<td>1.99</td>
<td>1.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>non-users: 2.07</td>
<td>2.09</td>
<td>2.08</td>
<td>2.09</td>
<td>2.16*</td>
<td>2.09</td>
<td>2.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to discover places away from the tourist crowds</td>
<td>users: 2.44*</td>
<td>2.36*</td>
<td>2.43*</td>
<td>2.36*</td>
<td>2.57</td>
<td>2.49*</td>
<td>2.25*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>non-users: 2.74*</td>
<td>2.72*</td>
<td>2.69*</td>
<td>2.70*</td>
<td>2.68</td>
<td>2.70*</td>
<td>2.67*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to discover and try out pleasant little cafés and restaurants</td>
<td>users: 2.50*</td>
<td>2.55</td>
<td>2.53</td>
<td>2.51</td>
<td>2.59</td>
<td>2.50*</td>
<td>2.38*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>non-users: 2.66*</td>
<td>2.62</td>
<td>2.62</td>
<td>2.62</td>
<td>2.61</td>
<td>2.65*</td>
<td>2.62*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to visit smaller and extraordinary museums and attractions</td>
<td>users: 2.61*</td>
<td>2.51*</td>
<td>2.53*</td>
<td>2.53*</td>
<td>2.67*</td>
<td>2.69*</td>
<td>2.42*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>non-users: 2.86*</td>
<td>2.84*</td>
<td>2.83*</td>
<td>2.83*</td>
<td>2.85*</td>
<td>2.81*</td>
<td>2.80*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to get to know the places where the locals go to</td>
<td>users: 2.46*</td>
<td>2.43*</td>
<td>2.49*</td>
<td>2.38*</td>
<td>2.54*</td>
<td>2.47*</td>
<td>2.33*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>non-users: 2.69*</td>
<td>2.67*</td>
<td>2.65*</td>
<td>2.67*</td>
<td>2.68*</td>
<td>2.69*</td>
<td>2.64*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

According to the T-Test the values that are marked with an * show a significant difference (p ≤ 0.05). source: own survey 2010

Activities and length of stay

(1 = very high importance, 5 = no importance)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>1 day trip</th>
<th>1-2 nights</th>
<th>3-4 nights</th>
<th>5-7 nights</th>
<th>8-14 nights</th>
<th>15-31 nights</th>
<th>1 month or longer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>to see the most important sights</td>
<td>3.10</td>
<td>3.22</td>
<td>3.05</td>
<td>2.81</td>
<td>2.94</td>
<td>2.70</td>
<td>2.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to discover places away from the tourist crowds</td>
<td>2.27</td>
<td>2.29</td>
<td>1.99</td>
<td>1.92</td>
<td>2.16</td>
<td>2.16</td>
<td>2.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to visit smaller, extraordinary museums &amp; attractions</td>
<td>3.10</td>
<td>3.22</td>
<td>3.05</td>
<td>2.81</td>
<td>2.94</td>
<td>2.70</td>
<td>2.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to get to know the places where the locals go to</td>
<td>2.19</td>
<td>2.19</td>
<td>2.19</td>
<td>2.19</td>
<td>2.19</td>
<td>2.19</td>
<td>2.19</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

source: own survey 2010

Social web use in relation to the type of sights and districts visited

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of sights</th>
<th>Number of well-known sights visited</th>
<th>Number of niche sights visited</th>
<th>Number of well-known districts visited</th>
<th>Number of niche districts visited</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>social networks users</td>
<td>4.43</td>
<td>1.48*</td>
<td>2.90*</td>
<td>.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>non-users</td>
<td>4.32</td>
<td>1.00*</td>
<td>2.69*</td>
<td>.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>blogs users</td>
<td>4.68*</td>
<td>1.72*</td>
<td>3.03*</td>
<td>.73*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>non-users</td>
<td>4.26*</td>
<td>1.02*</td>
<td>2.68*</td>
<td>.50*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>video sites users</td>
<td>4.42</td>
<td>1.55*</td>
<td>4.81</td>
<td>.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>non-users</td>
<td>4.34</td>
<td>1.09*</td>
<td>2.77</td>
<td>.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>photo communities users</td>
<td>4.54</td>
<td>1.40*</td>
<td>2.84</td>
<td>.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>non-users</td>
<td>4.30</td>
<td>1.12*</td>
<td>2.76</td>
<td>.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>review sites users</td>
<td>4.52</td>
<td>1.40*</td>
<td>2.93*</td>
<td>.62*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>non-users</td>
<td>4.23</td>
<td>1.00*</td>
<td>2.64*</td>
<td>.50*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>travel communities users</td>
<td>4.43</td>
<td>1.51*</td>
<td>2.95*</td>
<td>.65*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>non-users</td>
<td>4.33</td>
<td>1.02*</td>
<td>2.69*</td>
<td>.50*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>microblogs users</td>
<td>4.11</td>
<td>1.48*</td>
<td>2.51</td>
<td>.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>non-users</td>
<td>4.38</td>
<td>1.15</td>
<td>2.79</td>
<td>.54</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Cluster analysis

Niche tourist (n=271)  Ants tourist (n=854)

- Slightly older
- Greater length of stay
- Repeat visitor
- More interested in niche offers
- More impressed by places off the beaten track
- Often VFR-travellers,
- Interested in contact with locals
- More use of social media

Slightly younger
More short trip travellers
First-time visitors
Much less interested in niche offers
More impressed by well-known sights
Most-selected accommodation: hostel
Interested in contact with locals
Social media less important
Social web use and its impact on tourist behaviour – most important results

- Interest in niche offers – only partly connected to increased social web use
- Other influencing factors: length of stay, age of traveller, trip’s purpose
- Niche tourists vs. Ants-tourists
- Social web user = hybrid consumer

Central research question

In what way does an increased importance of the social web affect urban tourists’ behaviour?

Social web use: impact on travel behaviour

Social Web users
- more interested in niche offers than non-users
- longer at the destination, older
- at the same time also more interested in standard sights

Further influencing factors
- length of stay
- knowledge about city
- contact with locals

→ social web only partly acts as a filter that drives travellers towards niches

5 Conclusion
Conclusion

→ Trail of ants will continue to exist
  - User-generated content → often reproduction instead of generating new content
  - Increase in cultural capital through unusual travel experiences → no incentive for dissemination of information

Outlook

- social web as a medium for all generations
- strong focus on reviews
- mobile internet & social media

Thank you!
Niches & Long Tail

What is a niche company?

*Defining characteristics – at least one of the following:*

- specialized offer (to meet identified customer needs),
- greater success for the company by focusing on specific target markets,
- compared to companies in the overall market, other ways of controlling the business will be chosen,
- as a quality leader and trendsetter niche players are successful because "they do things differently". (cf. Danner 2002: 56)