

#tourism: The Influence of Social Media on Satisfaction
with Visitor Experiences in Churchill, Manitoba

by

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Abstract

Social media and tourism research has focused on the role of social media during the travel process, as well as the influence of social media during the pre-trip phase of travel in making travel decisions and influencing loyalty to a destination. The influence of social media on visitor satisfaction is an area not only limited in investigation within the social media and tourism literature, but also has important implications for tourism management professionals and organizations in informing future decisions and strategies. Satisfaction influences loyalty towards a destination, whether that is by influencing the decision to visit the destination again and/or recommending it to others. Using del Bosque and San Martín's (2008) cognitive-affective model of tourist satisfaction as the theoretical framework, the study presented here investigated how viewing trip-related social media content during the pre-trip phase of travel influenced visitor satisfaction. Churchill, a renowned tourism destination in Manitoba, Canada, was the site used for this exploration. Sixteen participants were recruited post-visit over a two-week period in August 2016 at the Churchill Airport and Churchill train station. The study followed a qualitative approach using semi-structured interviews ranging from 20-30 minutes. The findings confirm that viewing social media content can reveal new information about a place, but also identified that social media can influence expectations, which can subsequently influence visitor satisfaction. However, social media appears to only influence visitor satisfaction when travelers view components of a destination on social media that are important to them in achieving satisfaction. Participants in the study viewed social media content of different components of Churchill, but wildlife experiences were the main component of visitor satisfaction. Other components of the destination, such as accommodations and food and beverage, did not appear to significantly contribute to satisfaction. Therefore, social media

content contributed to satisfaction only for participants who viewed content of wildlife on social media sites before their trip. Consequently, these findings suggest that Martilla and James' (1977) importance performance analysis (IPA) model may better explain satisfaction within this research than del Bosque and San Martín's (2008) cognitive-affective model of tourist satisfaction. As IPA is generally applied in quantitative research, future quantitative studies verifying that the IPA model is the best fit would be beneficial.

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Chapter I: Purpose

Social media has altered society in ways never imagined. Social network sites including Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Pinterest, have shaped the way we interact with friends and family, organizations, and businesses. These sites have also influenced how we spend our leisure time. A major advantage of social media is it provides individuals with the ability to stay connected with friends/family and share personal experiences through photos and status updates. In addition to individual use, however, social media is a powerful tool for organizations and businesses and, with millions of users worldwide, social media has become a popular means of reaching consumers. Not only is the audience size large, but the way in which businesses and organizations capture clientele from this marketing medium is unique. Unlike other forms of marketing, social media creates a two-way relationship between businesses and consumers by sharing content, news, and feedback. It can also reach beyond users who “like” or “follow” organizations (fans) to also include their friends or connections (Lipsman, Mud, Rich, & Bruich, 2012). These distinct aspects increase engagement and loyalty among fans, positively influence friends of fans, and help generate incremental purchases among both parties (Lipsman et al., 2012). Due to its social nature, social media also tends to include a number of hyperlinks and, when updated frequently, can influence presence on search engines (Xiang & Gretzel, 2010).

With these advantages available to organizations, the tourism industry is no exception when it comes to utilizing social media for marketing and promotion. Xiang and Gretzel (2010) even suggest that “tourism marketers can no longer ignore the role of social media without risking to become irrelevant” (p. 186). A number of tourism entities, including destination marketing organizations (DMOs), which are “organization[s] responsible for the marketing of an identifiable destination” (Pike, 2012, p. 31) and communicate their tourism product to potential

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tourists, “create positive image and word-of-mouth” (Xiang & Gretzel, 2010, p. 181) to entice tourists to purchase their goods and services. Moreover, tourism businesses on social media can be useful to visitors at any point during the travel experience, including in the pre-trip/anticipatory phase (dreaming, planning, booking), during the trip/experiential phase (on site experiences), and post-trip/reflective phase (recollection, sharing), providing opportunities to build engagement with users and to generate purchases. As Minazzi (2015) explains:

[Social media engagement] can happen in all steps of the travel process: in the planning phase, because a video can stimulate the traveler’s imagination about a destination; during the trip: when travelers are searching for interesting things to do at the destination or for sharing; and then at home, alone or with others, in the phase of recollection of the experience. (p. 53)

Minazzi’s sentiment is well documented in the existing literature, and a number of studies have found that tourists engage with social media during all phases of the travel process, contributing to the growing interest in social media and tourism within the academic community (Leung, Law, van Hoof, & Buhalis, 2013; Zeng & Gerritsen, 2014).

Much of the existing research on social media and tourism focuses on the application of social media from the supplier’s perspective rather than the traveler’s perspective (Leung et al., 2013). Of those studies that have examined social media from the tourist’s perspective and the phases of travel, the pre-trip phase and how tourists use social media to plan their trips are primarily considered (Zeng & Gerritsen, 2014). Although there is research that has evaluated all phases of the travel process at once (Cox, Burgess, Sellitto, & Buultjens, 2009; Fotis, Buhalis, & Rossides, 2012), these studies determine the level of use of social media at each phase and have actually shown conflicting results. While there has been exponential growth of academic

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publications on social media and tourism in recent years, there is limited research that considers how using social media when dreaming about and planning a trip during the pre-trip phase of travel can influence the recollection of visitor experiences during the post-trip phase.

Specifically, how social media content influences expectations and subsequent visitor satisfaction. Although this information may not appear to be useful from a tourism supplier perspective, as they have already received the financial investment from the traveler, it may potentially have an impact on future business, as satisfaction influences customer loyalty towards the destination, including visiting again and/or recommending it to others (Bigné, Andreu, & Gnoth, 2005; Bigné, Sánchez, & Sánchez, 2001; del Bosque & San Martín, 2008; Kozak & Rimmington, 2000; Lee, Lee, & Lee, 2005; Yoon & Uysal, 2005).

Because tourism services are intangible, and it is difficult to assess their quality in advance of consumption (Nickerson, Kerr, & Murray, 2014), word of mouth (WOM) is a significant resource for travelers planning their trip (Litvin, Goldsmith, & Pan, 2008) and can influence intent to visit a destination (Tussyadiah, Park, & Fesenmaier, 2010). Electronic word of mouth (eWOM), defined as “all informal communications directed at consumers through internet-based technology related to the usage or characteristics of particular goods and services, or their sellers” (Litvin et al., 2008, p. 461), often influences the travel planning process (Litvin et al., 2008). This includes on social media platforms (Sotiriadis & van Zyl, 2013), potentially influencing travel decisions (Tham, Croy, & Mair, 2013). Social media is also one of the most common outlets used by travelers to post photographs (Lo, McKercher, Lo, Cheung, & Law, 2011). Approximately one in five travelers post photos on social networking sites after their trip (Expedia Media Solutions, 2013) which can generate interest from friends and/or followers to travel to the destination (Lin & Huang, 2006; White, 2010). Videos containing travel-related

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content on social media sites such as YouTube can also increase interest and influence travel decisions (Crowel, Gribben, & Loo, 2014; Tussyadiah & Fesenmaier, 2009).

In short, social media “has democratized the image creation and dissemination process” (Lo et al., 2011, p. 726). When travelers use social media to plan their trips, it can project an image of a destination that is different from traditional information sources such as the DMO (Leung, Law, & Lee, 2011; Schmallegger, Carson, & Jacobsen, 2010; Stepchenkova & Zhan, 2013). This may create different trip expectations compared to travelers who view traditional content, as destination image influences trip expectations (Bigné et al., 2001; del Bosque & San Martín, 2008). These expectations can influence visitor satisfaction, which will in turn influence loyalty to the destination (del Bosque & San Martín, 2008). Thus, it is important for tourism suppliers to better understand how social media influences expectations and subsequent visitor satisfaction, as satisfaction influences a traveler’s intention to visit the destination again and/or recommend it to others, and further insight may allow suppliers to better guide marketing efforts.

The purpose of this research is to examine the influence of social media on visitor satisfaction at tourist destination areas. This research considers visitor satisfaction based on viewing social media content before traveling for visitors to Churchill, Manitoba. Churchill is a tourism destination known for its mega fauna such as polar bears and beluga whales, and is considered a prime destination for viewing the natural phenomenon of Aurora borealis or the “northern lights”. The research data were collected using semi-structured interviews as a qualitative research method. This research approach acknowledges that reality is socially constructed. The data were analyzed by preparing and organizing the data (transcripts from audio interviews), coding and reducing the data into meaningful themes and combining the codes

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into broader categories. The findings from the data are presented using excerpts from the interview transcripts and follow with a discussion.

To guide the research process, a detailed literature review of previous studies that examined relevant aspects of social media and tourism is discussed in the subsequent section. From there, the study's methodology and greater justification for its use in this research is outlined. The findings from the research data are presented thereafter. Lastly, a discussion regarding the study's findings takes place and conclusions are made, with implications for tourism management professionals being identified.

Chapter II: Literature Review

Web 2.0, Social Media, and User Generated Content: The “Democratization” of Information Sharing

Until recently, the marketing and promotion of tourism services and destinations online was primarily a one-way process. To gather information about travel, tourists used the internet as a resource to find out more about destinations. This information was often provided from tourism suppliers, directly. Known as Web 1.0, it was the “first stage of the World Wide Web (WWW) characterized by a ‘read-only’ and mainly unidirectional medium” (Minazzi, 2015, p. 2). Web 1.0 was “based on a static and passive approach: companies create websites to publish information (as in a brochure) and users can only read it” (Minazzi, 2015, p. 2). Therefore, when thinking about and planning vacations, tourists viewed websites as they would have other traditional forms of marketing, such as television, magazines, and books.

With the evolution of Web 2.0, “where several forms of social interactions of everyday life take place among users, generating content” (Minazzi, 2015, p. 3), there has been a shift from this primarily supplier to consumer relationship to what some refer to as the “democratization” of information sharing (Leung et al., 2013). According to Kaplan and Haenlein (2010), Web 2.0 serves as a platform for the use of social media. They define social media as “a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of User Generated Content” (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010, p. 61). Social media includes collaborative projects (Wikipedia), blogs and content communities (Flickr, YouTube), social networking sites (Facebook), and virtual worlds (World of Warcraft, Second Life) (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Social media subsequently facilitates the creation and exchange of User Generated Content (UGC), which is

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“the sum of all the ways in which people make use of social media [and consists of] the various forms of media content that are publicly available and created by end-users” (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010, p. 61). In short, Web 2.0 serves as a platform for the use of social media, and social media allows for the creation and exchange of UGC. A visual representation of the proliferation of Web 2.0 is illustrated in Figure 1.

While Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) organize social media into meaningful classifications, they do not include review sites such as TripAdvisor that arguably contain UGC which can play a role in the travel process. Nevertheless, their definition which consists of the presence of a forum for UGC to take place is sufficient in allowing for the inclusion of applications such as TripAdvisor as forms of social media. In fact, other researchers incorporate these types of applications into Kaplan and Haenlein’s definitional framework (Minazzi, 2015).

As a technological platform, Web 2.0 has significantly altered the way in which we communicate with one another in the online environment. Rather than being solely the recipient of information, there has been a shift in control over online content where consumers are now part of the information dissemination process, not only in a two-way relationship between

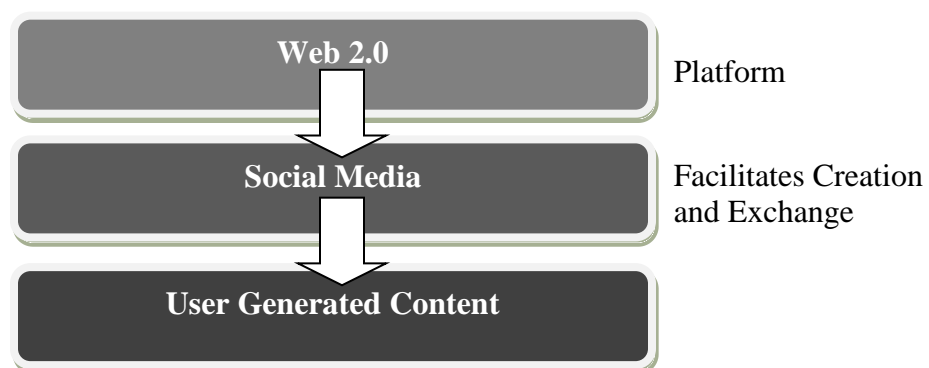


Figure 1. Proliferation of web 2.0. Adapted from “Users of the world, unite! The challenges and opportunities of social media,” by A. M. Kaplan and M. Haenlein, 2010, *Business Horizons*, 53(1), p. 61.

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themselves and marketers but by exchanging information with other users through eWOM. This has resulted in a transfer of power from companies to consumers (Hennig-Thurau, Gwinner, Walsh, & Gremler, 2004). As Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004) explain:

Given the great number of potential receivers of eWOM communication, the long term availability of the comments, and their accessibility by companies, a consumer's individual articulation of a consumption problem can contribute to the *exertion of (collective) power over companies*. Since negative consumer comments can influence the way a company and its image are perceived, public articulations may be used by consumers as an instrument of power. Therefore, eWOM communication provides a mechanism to shift power from companies to consumers, particularly in cases where criticism is articulated by many consumers simultaneously... (p. 42)

The significance of this relationship is evident by the various realms in which it occurs. Not only does it exist in the tourism industry, but also in other contexts such as between retail businesses and their customers. In addition, users can post their opinions on the latest movies, and they can propose story ideas to news media outlets on the web (Dellarocas, 2003).

The transfer of power to consumers to communicate in the Web 2.0 era can have significant implications for tourism destinations and the image they wish to project to prospective tourists. While social media and the content that users generate can serve as an effective and low-cost marketing tool which can be broadcast to a large-scale audience, it can potentially tarnish the reputation of the destination if the comments made by consumers are negative (Dellarocas, 2003; Zeng & Gerritsen, 2014). Unlike traditional WOM, eWOM can linger on the internet and consumers can view posted content over longer periods of time (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004). However, timeliness, currency, and the extent to which content is

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up-to-date can play a role in viewers' perception of validity and quality of information being posted (Cheung & Thadani, 2012), and negative comments in limited quantities are unlikely to be detrimental to tourism businesses overall (Doh & Hwang, 2009; Minazzi, 2015).

Some argue that UGC is more reliable and more credible than traditional tourist information sources (Gretzel, Yoo, & Purifoy, 2007; Schmallegger & Carson, 2008). In addition, UGC can be viewed as more trustworthy than official tourism websites (Fotis et al., 2012), because it is considered independent of tourism businesses and organizations (Litvin et al., 2008). Tourists especially trust these sources when they perceive themselves as similar to those who contributed the UGC (Ayeh, Au, & Law, 2013). In fact, holiday review sites such as TripAdvisor, where tourists can post their comments/feedback on their tourism experiences, are the most popular Web 2.0-enabled travel sites (Papathanassis & Knolle, 2011), and trust in users' information exchanged and written online can act as an incentive to use social media when organizing and taking vacation trips (Parra-López, Bulchand-Gidumal, Gutiérrez-Taño, & Díaz-Armas, 2011). Gretzel et al. (2007) note that, "reviews help [tourists] learn about a travel destination, product or service, help them evaluate alternatives, help them avoid places they would not enjoy and also provide them with ideas" (p. 5). In addition, "reading other travelers' online reviews increases confidence in decisions, makes it easier to imagine what a place would be like, helps reduce risk/uncertainty, makes it easier to reach decisions, and helps with planning pleasure trips more efficiently" (Gretzel et al., 2007, p. 5). While other studies have shown that sources such as DMO websites are more trustworthy than social media sites (Cox et al., 2009; Munar & Jacobsen, 2013), social media still acts as a meaningful additional source of information for travelers when planning their trips.

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With the democratization of information sharing through Web 2.0, it is possible that UGC on social media can contradict, reinforce, or reveal/introduce new aspects of a destination not promoted by traditional marketing sources (Schmallegger & Carson, 2009). Therefore, social media can ultimately shape a destination's image which can vary significantly from the image being projected by traditional information sources. Image influences expectations, and expectations influence visitor satisfaction (del Bosque & San Martín, 2008). Subsequently, satisfaction influences one's intention to visit the destination again and/or recommend it to others (Bigné et al., 2005; Bigné et al., 2001; del Bosque & San Martín, 2008; Kozak & Rimmington, 2000; Lee et al., 2005; Yoon & Uysal, 2005), of whom can consider the recommendations when choosing a destination to visit (Beerli & Martín, 2004). It is important, then, to further evaluate the role of destination image in social media.

Social Media and Destination Image

Prior to visiting a destination, visitors will anticipate their experience by viewing images, videos, reviews, and so on, to construct and reinforce their image of a place, and create a set of expectations about the destination (Pitchford, 2008). The expectations that travelers develop are influenced by what is referred to as destination image. Although there is not one universal definition, destination image can be considered "the expression of all objective knowledge, impressions, prejudice, imaginations, and emotional thoughts an individual or group might have of a particular place" (Lawson & Baud-Bovy, 1977, p. 10). A destination's image is not only built when a traveler is dreaming about and planning their trip, but it is modified throughout the entire travel process. As Jenkins (1999) puts it, destination image "influence[s] a tourist's travel decision-making, cognition and behaviour at a destination as well as satisfaction levels and recollection of the experience" (p. 1).

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Destination image consists of memories, associations, and imaginations of a particular place, making it individually unique for each tourist (Jenkins & McArthur, 1996). According to Gallarza, Gil Saura, and Calderón García (2002), “Image always responds to an interiorization of some perceptions, and not everyone has the same perceptions. Therefore, image is always subjective” (p. 71). It can include both directly observable attributes (scenery/natural attractions), and those which are intangible (friendliness/hospitality of the local people, climate), as well as encompass an overall/holistic impression of the place (Echtner & Ritchie, 1993). Image can contain what is similar about a destination and what is unique (Echtner & Ritchie, 1993). It can vary depending on one’s familiarity with (MacKay & Fesenmaier, 1997), and distance from (Telisman-Kosuta, 1989), the destination. Image can be shaped by residents’ attitude towards tourism (Gallarza et al., 2002) and, due to its visual nature, be especially influenced by images of the destination itself (MacKay & Fesenmaier, 1997).

A traveler’s image of a destination can change (Gallarza et al, 2002), and can do so dramatically in the short term (due to environmental/situational influences), which can subsequently change a destination’s identity and/or projected image in the long term (Govers, Go, & Kumar, 2007). However, it can take a substantial amount of time for image to change (Gartner & Hunt, 1987) and it can linger over time despite tremendous change taking place at the destination (Crompton & Lamb, 1986). Nevertheless, there are certain factors that contribute to shaping one’s image of a destination. One of these factors that is relevant to this research is the types of information sources consulted prior to the trip. To elaborate, destination image can be influenced by sources which are considered induced, autonomous, or organic. Specifically, Gartner (1994) outlines a spectrum of subtypes, including overt induced I, overt induced II, covert induced I, covert induced II, autonomous, unsolicited organic, solicited organic, and

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organic. Overt induced I information sources consist of traditional forms of advertising, such as television, radio, brochures, billboards, and print media, by DMOs. According to Gartner (1994), DMOs use these types of information sources in “direct attempts to form particular images in the minds of prospective visitors... [and] to construct an image of the salient attributes of the destination in the minds of the targeted audience” (p. 197). Similarly, overt induced II information sources are those which originate from “tour operators, wholesalers, and organizations which have a vested interest in the travel decision process” (Gartner, 1994, p. 199). Covert induced I information sources are, though still traditional in nature, represented by a celebrity or recognizable spokesperson to help enhance the credibility of the DMO’s marketing messages (Gartner, 1994). Covert induced II information sources are those which include articles, reports, or stories about a place from seemingly unbiased sources but are in fact recruited by DMOs, such as travel writers or special interest media groups, also in an attempt to gain credibility for marketing efforts (Gartner, 1994). Autonomous information sources, conversely, consist of reports, documentaries, movies and news articles created independently of the DMO (Gartner, 1994). Unsolicited organic information sources stem primarily from individuals who have visited a destination, or believe to know its attributes, and provide information about the destination when it has not been requested (Gartner, 1994). Conversely, solicited organic information sources typically consist of friends/family who are believed to be knowledgeable about the destination and travelers will seek their guidance/input when making travel decisions (i.e. WOM) (Gartner, 1994). The final subtype of Gartner’s (1994) spectrum is organic, which consists of information regarding a destination based on visitation to the area. The influence that this subtype will have on image depends on the intensity of the visit and an

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individual's interaction with the place, namely the number of visits to the destination and their duration (Beerli & Martín, 2004).

In addition to information sources, personal factors including psychological characteristics (tourists' motivations) and experience of leisure travel contribute to influencing destination image (Beerli & Martín, 2004). Sociodemographic characteristics (income, gender, age, education levels, country of origin) also influence one's image of a destination (Beerli & Martín, 2004), albeit modestly (MacKay & Fesenmaier, 1997). According to Beerli and Martín (2004), "personal factors affect one's cognitive organization of perceptions, thus also influencing the perceptions of the environment and the resulting image" (p. 664). When destination image is constructed by these factors, the perceiver forms perceptual/cognitive evaluations, which consist of one's beliefs/knowledge about a destination's attributes (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999). As personal factors, in conjunction with information sources, influence destination image, the resulting cognitive image influences a traveler's affective evaluations, which involve their feelings toward, or attachment to, a destination (Beerli & Martín, 2004). These evaluations, with cognitive image, subsequently form the overall image of a place (Beerli & Martín, 2004). A model of the formation of destination image is shown in Figure 2.

While information sources influence destination image and subsequent loyalty towards a destination, it is important to note that there can be discrepancies between organic and induced information sources with respect to the images that they project, which may lead to differences in trip expectations and subsequent visitor satisfaction. In their study on potential tourists to Turkey, Greece, Italy, and Egypt, Baloglu and McCleary (1999) found that WOM (organic information source) had an influence on all three cognitive variables of image conceptualized for the study (quality of experience, attractions, and value/environment), whereas advertisements

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(induced information source) only had an influence on the image of value/environment.

Similarly, for tourists who visited Lanzarote, Spain, Beerli and Martín (2004) found only one relationship between one induced information source and one factor of cognitive image, where travel agency staff had a positive influence on the image that tourists had of the “sun and sand” dimension, whereas all organic and autonomous information sources (friends and family members, guidebooks, news, articles, reports, documentaries and programs about the destination in the media) had a causal relationship with one or two factors of cognitive image, “which

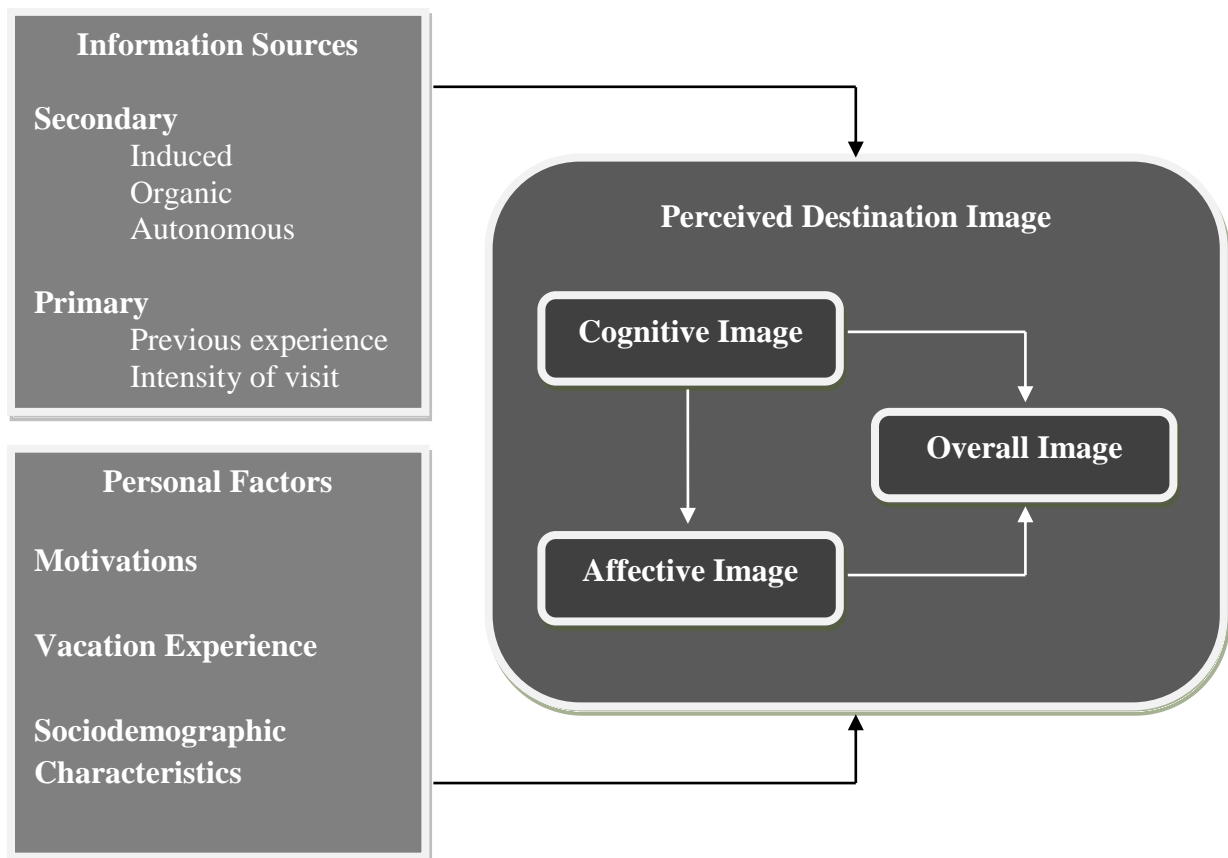


Figure 2. Model of the formation of destination image. From “Factors influencing destination image,” by A. Beerli and J. D. Martín, 2004, *Annals of Tourism Research*, 31(3), p. 660.

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demonstrates that there are differences in the information provided by these different sources regarding the attributes of image that they project” (Beerli & Martín, 2004, p. 670).

Differences in organic and induced images have also been found in the digital age. In their study on image representations of Macau on the internet, Choi, Lehto, and Morrison (2007) found that the image of Macau projected online varied by the different online information sources. Induced information sources such as travel trade and the Macau Government Tourism Office were primarily associated with sightseeing places for the former and culture-oriented and developed city image for the latter (Choi et al., 2007). For organic and autonomous information sources, blogs were mainly associated with impressions and interesting points of Macau travel, and magazines emphasized Macau as a gaming city (Choi et al., 2007).

As social media facilitates the creation and exchange of UGC, this content can also serve as an organic information source for potential tourists. Much like its traditional counterparts, however, UGC on social media can also project an image of a destination that differs from that which is promoted by induced information sources such as a DMO. In their study on perceived destination image of Hong Kong, Leung et al. (2011) found an overall positive image was conveyed through blog entries on Ctrip.com (the largest travel website in mainland China). They indicated that Hong Kong’s image is that of “a superior shopping and sightseeing destination with convenient transportation and a variety of tourist attractions” (Leung et al., 2011, p. 135). Based on their content analysis of travelers’ blog posts on Ctrip.com, however, Leung et al. (2011) discovered that the destination’s image consisted of not only being a shopping paradise, but also a place with great museums, colonial and modern buildings, city gardens and parks, and greenery, despite the latter features not being significantly promoted by the Hong Kong Tourism Board. This type of destination image discrepancy between the DMO and UGC on social media

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was also found in an image content analysis study of the Flinders Ranges region in South Australia. Schmallegger et al. (2010) found that while most tourist images of scenic mountain ranges, ruggedness of the country and wide-open space, as well as sense of adventure and peaceful atmosphere were reinforced by the DMO, other images either contradicted those promoted by the DMO or, alternatively, revealed or introduced new aspects not promoted by the DMO. DMO images such as those involving regional cuisine; activities such as mountain biking, camel riding and scenic flights, as well as positive images of friendly locals or quaint little towns were not present in UGC (Schmallegger et al., 2010). Conversely, activities such as mountain climbing and camping under the stars, as well as images of ruins and abandoned homes were captured by tourists but were not promoted by the DMO (Schmallegger et al., 2010). In a study comparing images from the official tourism website of Peru to those posted by travelers to the country on the user-generated photography website Flickr, Stepchenkova and Zhan (2013) similarly found that, overall, the DMO pictures for Peru tended to feature more traditional clothing, festivals and rituals, art objects and tour attributes, whereas Flickr users posted more images depicting the way of life in Peru, plants, domesticated animals, and food destination attributes. In addition, the images on the DMO website for Peru were distributed somewhat evenly featuring 24 regions of the country, unlike the travelers' images on Flickr where the provinces of Cusco, Arequipa, Puno, Lima, and Ica were more heavily presented. These findings led Stepchenkova and Zhan (2013) to suggest that this could “contribute disproportionately in shaping the overall destination image of Peru” (p. 600).

These studies reinforce the notion that UGC on social media can project an image of a destination that is different from that of induced information sources such as DMOs, potentially creating different expectations of travel experiences. As interpreting image is a subjective

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process, however, it would be beneficial to better understand from the tourists' perspective how they perceive a destination's image when they view UGC on social media in future studies to further support the findings of content analysis-based research.

What is less understood is how viewing social media content, which may differ from that of information sources such as the DMO, influences expectations and subsequent satisfaction with travel experiences. This could have implications for DMOs, especially those involving Arctic communities where promotional efforts tend to focus on wilderness and scenery and underscore local cultural traits and way of life (Milne, Grekin, & Woodley, 1998). Before investigating this further, it is worth considering first the importance that tourists place on social media content as an information source during the travel process for any findings to be meaningful, which leads to the next topic of discussion.

The Role of Social Media in the Travel Process

When taking a trip, a tourist enters a cycle that begins before visiting a destination and continues after the travel experience. Although a number of representations exist that illustrate this process, the basic phases include the planning/anticipation phase, travel-to phase, on-site phase, travel-back phase, and recollection phase (Clawson & Knetsch, 1963). In anticipation of the travel experience, the planning phase (also known as the pre-trip phase) involves dreaming about the next trip and accumulating mental images about vacation experiences, which can lead to making actual plans to visit the destination such as planning activities one would like to do while they are there, as well as booking and reserving such things as accommodations, excursions, and so on (Clawson & Knetsch, 1963; Craig-Smith & French, 1993; Google, 2012; Gunn, 1988; Killion, 1992). It is during this travel planning phase that one's image of a destination can change as a result of searching for additional information about the destination

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(Gunn, 1988). The travel-to phase consists of activities involved in traveling to the destination, such as mode of transportation. During the trip, the on-site (experiential) phase consists of the experience itself and on-site activities that take place at the destination (Clawson & Knetsch, 1963; Craig-Smith & French, 1993; Google, 2012; Gunn, 1988; Killion, 1992). The travel-back/travel-from phase consists of activities involved in traveling home from the destination and may vary from those conducted in the travel-to phase (Clawson & Knetsch, 1963). Finally, the recollection phase (also known as the post-trip phase) can include reflecting on satisfaction levels (Clawson & Knetsch, 1963) and sharing travel experiences with others by, for instance, showing photos or by writing reviews. This is also when one accumulates new images of the destination based on their travel experience (Craig-Smith & French, 1993; Google, 2012; Gunn, 1988; Killion, 1992). Gunn (1988) further argues that a tourist continues to build and modify their images of the destination throughout the entire travel process. Although some aspects of the cycle's phases can overlap (sharing travel experiences can take place during the trip), it can still serve as a useful framework when discussing the role of social media in the travel process. Based on the works of Clawson and Knetsch (1963), Craig-Smith and French (1993), Google (2012), Gunn (1988), and Killion (1992), a model of the travel process is illustrated in Figure 3.

Whether or not tourists use social media during the travel process is an area that has been explored within the academic literature. Research indicates that social media sources are identified prevalently in search engine results of tourist destinations and, “[g]iven their important role in facilitating travelers’ access to the online tourism domain, search engines directly and indirectly promote social media to travel information searchers” (Xiang & Gretzel, 2010, p. 185). Additional studies have identified that social media use during the travel process is influenced by certain motivations. In their study of U.S. leisure travelers’ intention to use UGC on social

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media for travel planning, Ayeh et al. (2013) found that, in addition to age, incentives for using social media influenced intention, including perceived enjoyment, perceived ease of use, usefulness, attitude, and perceived similarity. The authors concluded that “individuals who normally disregard [UGC] may have the intention of using [UGC] for travel planning if they realize that doing so is useful, easy, and fun” (Ayeh et al., 2013, 139), and that “the more they perceive the contributors of [UGC] to be similar in terms of interests, the more likely they would

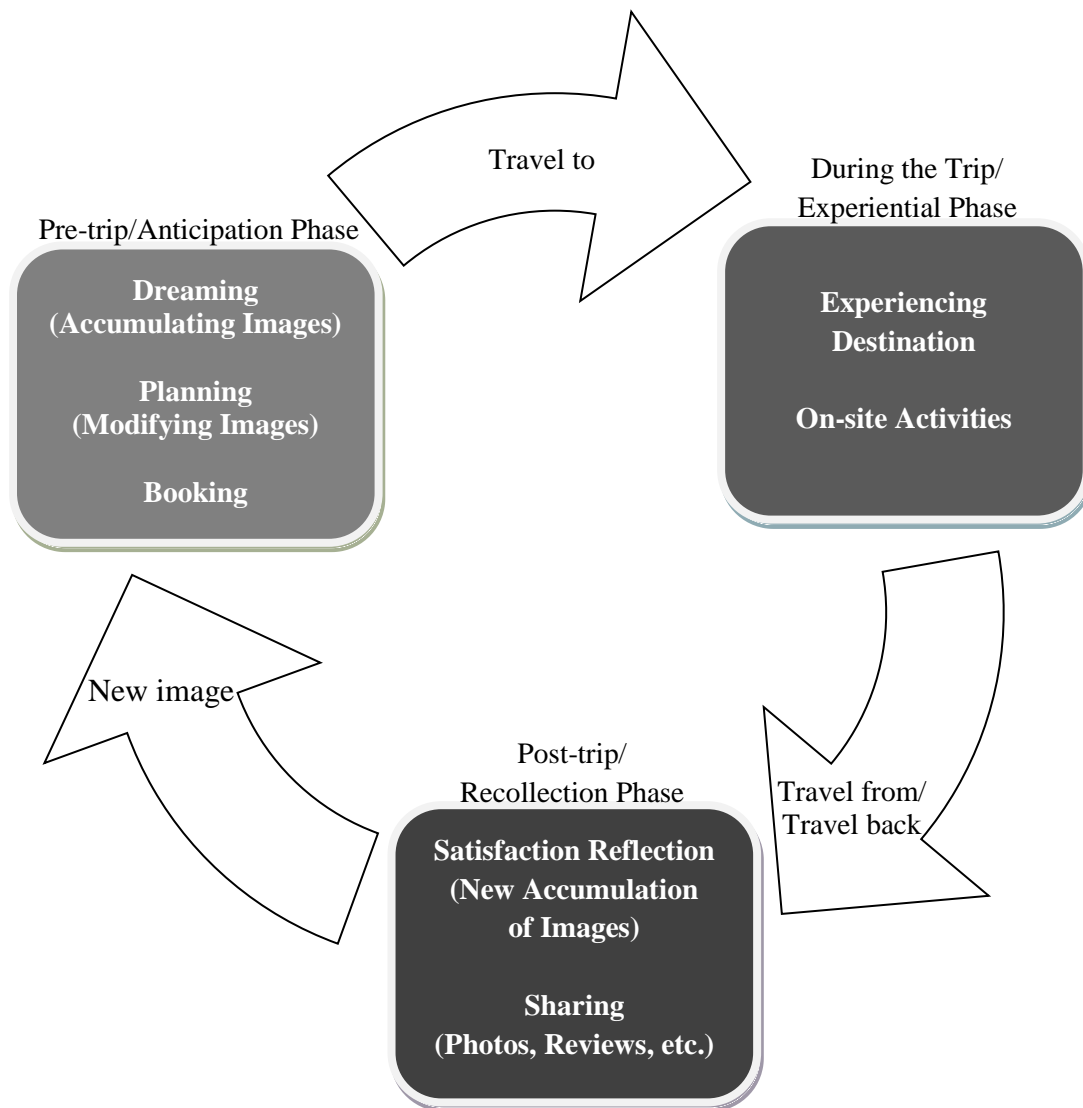


Figure 3. A model of the travel process.

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trust the source of the [UGC] and accept it for travel planning” (Ayeh et., 2013, 140). According to Parra-López et al. (2011), one’s intention to use social media when organizing and taking vacation trips is directly influenced by the perceived benefits of using social media. The authors identified that functional (informative, affordable, knowledge sharing), social (contact, relationships, and a sense of belonging with group members), and psychological (entertaining, instills a sense of pride) benefits can contribute to intention, and that the costs of using social media including effort (time), difficulty of use, and loss of privacy do not negatively influence one’s intention to use social media. They concluded that, “users perceive a series of benefits in the use of social media when organizing and taking vacation trips and that perception of benefits predisposes them to use those technologies” (Parra-López et al., 2011, p. 649). Although users may perceive a series of costs, Parra-López et al. (2011) indicated that “none of those costs has a significant impact on the user’s predisposition to use the technologies. Thus, users assume the existence of those costs but consider them neither inherent nor a barrier to the use of the technologies.” (p. 649-650). Based on the authors’ findings, travelers are likely to use social media during the travel process when they find value in doing so, despite the potential setbacks associated with social media use.

There is also research which has identified motivations for travelers to use social media during and after their trips. In their study on motivations for using social media for tourism purposes, Munar and Jacobsen (2014) found that factors such as personal and community-related benefits, as well as social capital, can influence tourists to use social media to share their travel experiences. Based on their findings of tourists from Denmark and Norway who visited Mallorca in Mediterranean Spain, the authors found that visitors were motivated to give back to something that contributed to their own travel planning. Munar and Jacobsen (2014) noted that

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40% of visitors wanted to help others by sharing their travel experiences and a similar percentage wanted to warn people about bad tourism products. In addition, one in four tourists spoke about their trip to maintain social connections and friendship, and the same number of visitors felt compelled to contribute to social media sites that were useful to them (Munar & Jacobsen, 2014). This desire for social interaction and concern for other consumers has also been identified in studies outside of the tourism realm (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004). In their study on the perceived experience and attitude towards the use of online social networks, Nusair, Erdem, Okumus, and Bilgihan (2012), found that not only are the websites used for socialization, self-expression, and communication but, “[t]hese social media sites are increasingly becoming a very important source for travelers for getting travel advice and suggestions” (p. 219).

Although findings have shown conflicting results, research has indicated that not only does the opportunity and motivation to use social media exist, but tourists use it at all stages of the travel process. In their study on the role of social media in the travel process, Cox et al. (2009) found that of tourists who visited social media sites for travel-related purposes, almost 80% did so during the pre-trip phase to find information about travel destinations or accommodation options. In addition, 51% of respondents indicated that they would make a final decision about booking a trip due to information they retrieved on social media (Cox et al., 2009). While some respondents did use social media during the trip to find out more about specific attractions (6%) as well as after the trip to share experiences with others (9%), social media use was most prevalent during the information search stage (Cox et al., 2009). In contrast, a follow-up study done by Fotis et al. (2012) found that social media was predominantly used during in the post-trip stage. Specifically, 78%, of respondents used social media for sharing experiences and photos with others after their trip, whereas almost 44% used social media when

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beginning to search for ideas on where to go for holidays during the pre-trip phase, and 49% used social media during their trip to stay connected with friends (Fotis et al., 2012). While Fotis et al. (2012) attributed contrast in the findings to cultural differences in Russia and the former Soviet Union Republics where their study took place, it is worth considering if the use of social media during the travel process had evolved over time. There was a three-year difference between the two studies and the introduction of new social media applications, mobile technology capabilities, and so on may have better accommodated tourists or made it more appealing for them to use social media in different ways. Despite these differences, there is evidence to suggest that social media can be/is used by tourists at all stages of the travel process.

When tourists use social media during the travel process, especially during the pre-trip phase when they are dreaming about/planning their next trip, its effectiveness in influencing loyalty towards a destination and making travel decisions is an additional consideration. As we will now investigate further, social media content can influence the travel planning process by contributing to one's image of a destination and influencing visitor loyalty.

The Influence of Social Media in the Travel Planning Process

Research indicates that social media content can influence the travel planning process, including travel purchase decisions. A study conducted by comScore (2007) found that 84% of review users identified online consumer-generated reviews as having a significant influence on their travel purchases. In addition, Crofton and Parker (2012) quantified the economic impacts of social media as marketing tools to tourism websites of Atlantic Canada and found that there was an increase in local consumer demand (accommodation rooms rented per 100 residents), and that using more forms of social media was associated with more rooms rented and higher occupancy (rooms rented as a percentage of rooms available for rent). More specifically, of the

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forms of social media considered in the study, Facebook, Twitter, RSS, YouTube and travel blogs were associated with higher levels of tourism, contributing to an increase in rooms rented per 100 residents when adjusted for seasonality (Crofton & Parker, 2012). It is important to note that the authors cautioned the interpretation of the results and suggested that follow-up studies on the continued use of social media tools, as well as consideration of additional social media applications such as Pinterest or Google+ in future studies, would prove beneficial (Crofton & Parker, 2012). Nevertheless, this work highlights the potential significance that social media content can have on travel decisions.

In contrast to practical findings, others have taken a theoretical approach in explorations of the relationship between social media content and travel decisions. Based on a grounded theory framework, Papathanassis and Knolle (2011) developed nine similar mock holiday offerings of beach resort destinations containing varying levels of user-generated reviews and tourism company content to determine how reviews influenced destination choice. They found that factors including adoption readiness (perceived accessibility to, and richness of, reviews), source-related heuristics (level of trustworthiness and reputation of the source), content-related heuristics (perceived factuality and neutrality of reviews as well as frequency of negative and positive reviews), and cognitive biases can play a role when choosing a destination. Based on their findings, Papathanassis and Knolle (2011) concluded that online reviews play “a secondary, complementary role to holiday selection” (p. 215). In addition, Sotiriadis and van Zyl (2013) focused on one form of social media – online reviews by users on Twitter from Europe and South Africa – and investigated the factors influencing purchase behaviour using a quantitative approach. They revealed that reliability as well as perceived expertise of users/followers can have an influential role in the use of tourism information on Twitter. Like Papathanassis and

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Knolle (2011), Sotiriadis and van Zyl (2013) claimed that social media applications such as Twitter can serve as “another marketing channel to be wisely used in integrated communications marketing of tourism services” (Sotiriadis & van Zyl, 2013, p. 103). Thus, while some research does indicate the significance of social media content and its influence on travel decisions and purchase behaviour, there is consensus that it is one tool among others that tourists use when planning vacations. When tourism suppliers consider its use, it should be done so in conjunction with other types of marketing efforts.

Social media content in the form of images (Lin & Huang, 2006; White, 2010) and video content (Tussyadiah & Fesenmaier, 2009; Crowel et al., 2014) can also generate travel ideas and influence loyalty towards a destination and potentially influence travel decisions. In their case study, Lin and Huang (2006) found that pictures posted on a blog by a Taiwanese engineer of his trip to the Aegean Sea in Greece generated significant interest from other Taiwanese residents, resulting in the blog being shared exponentially among friends and receiving two million visits over a six-month period. In their research, Lin and Huang (2006) found that “individuals either announce[d] plans to visit Greece immediately or at some point in the foreseeable future” (p. 1201). As Greece is a relatively unknown tourism destination in Taiwan (Lin & Huang, 2006), it is possible that this contributed to the prolific growth of interest in the area as a result of viewing images posted on the blog. White (2010) also studied the influence that images on social media can have on travel decisions. Based on a content and semiotics analysis of travel photo albums and comments posted by friends on Facebook, she concluded that, “While it is obviously extremely difficult to gauge how influential the travel photos of one are on the travel plans of another, it would appear that [they] certainly generated interest from friends as a result of the photos posted” (White, 2010, p. 127). It would be worthwhile to conduct follow-up studies to

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determine the extent to which these images influence travel decisions, but the studies of Lin and Huang (2006) and White (2010) do demonstrate that images on social media can influence visitor loyalty towards destinations.

Tussyadiah and Fesenmaier (2009) found that videos on social media can provide mental pleasure to viewers by stimulating fantasies and daydreams, as well as serve as a means for sharing travel information. In their content analysis of videos and their comments published on YouTube by travelers of their touristic activities in New York City, the authors identified seven mediating roles of the videos for viewers, including information sharing, daydreams/reminiscences, testimonials, perceived attractions, travel stimuli, tourists, and video quality. Tussyadiah and Fesenmaier (2009) noted that, “Viewers who have never been to New York appear to perceive the videos as a source of living their dreams and fantasies of visiting the city” (p. 35). Moreover, Tussyadiah and Fesenmaier (2009) indicated that, “Viewers at the anticipatory phase of experience utilize the videos (and the community) to seek or verify information about the city for future travel planning” (p. 35). Others have also shared similar notions that videos on social media can influence travel decisions. Crowel et al. (2014) pointed out that between 2013 and 2014, 88% percent of YouTube travel searches focused on destinations, attractions/points of interest, or general travel ideas. In 2014, nearly half of travel subscriptions on YouTube were to vlogs (video blogs) featuring personal travel experiences, which received four times more social engagement (likes, comments, shares, favourites, and subscriptions) than other types of travel content on YouTube, making it the most popular format of travel channel subscription (Crowel et al., 2014). In a 2014 initiative launched by Visit California, the organization took over the YouTube homepage masthead position in the United States, United Kingdom, Australia and Canada and featured a different video every hour for 24

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hours. This resulted in a 7% increase in trip consideration and a 17% rise in likelihood to visit California among viewers (Crowel et al., 2014). While it remains unclear as to whether viewing videos on social media has a direct impact on travel decisions, they can generate travel ideas and influence visitor loyalty, something that tourism organizations should consider when developing their marketing efforts.

From how travelers engage with social media during the travel process to the role that social media plays in travel decisions, there appears to be a significant interest in social media and tourism. This interest is growing within the academic community. Social media is continuously evolving as we are confronted with changes in, and the expansion of, the social media landscape. It is important, therefore, to identify where there are gaps in the existing literature. At present, research has primarily considered the pre-trip phase of the travel process and how social media can influence destination image, visitor loyalty, and travel decisions. There has also been an emphasis on content analysis rather than investigating the tourists' perspectives directly through interviews, which can better capture the subjective nature of the tourism experience. Although the influence of social media content on destination image is an important component of this study, it is how social media content influences satisfaction that is the focus of this research. It is important to better understand this overlooked aspect of the tourism experience as one's destination image, shaped by social media content before traveling, can potentially influence expectations and subsequent visitor satisfaction. Satisfaction not only influences loyalty towards a destination and the intention to visit the same destination in the future, but it can also shape the image that travelers transmit by WOM or eWOM to others, who then may consider this information when choosing a destination (Beerli & Martín, 2004).

Theoretical Framework: A Cognitive-Affective Model

Traditionally, the main component of satisfaction has been viewed as being primarily cognitive, and is considered a post-consumption judgement that a product or service fulfilled or exceeded expectations (Engel, Blackwell, & Miniard, 1990). For instance, in Oliver's (1980) expectancy disconfirmation theory, satisfaction is achieved based on the disconfirmation of expectations, where "consumers compare their perceptions of a product's performance to their expectations" (Spreng, Mackenzie, & Olshavsky, 1996, p. 15), and "[i]f perceived performance exceeds a consumer's expectations (a positive disconfirmation), then the consumer is satisfied. But if perceived performance falls short of his or her expectations (a negative disconfirmation), then the consumer is dissatisfied" (Spreng et al., 1996, p. 15). The influence of disconfirmation on satisfaction has been supported within the tourism context in previous research (Pizam & Milman, 1993, Weber, 1997).

Similarly, an evaluative congruity model has been proposed (Chon, 1990, Sirgy & Tyagi, 1986). Chon (1990) applies the evaluative congruity theory framework, namely outcome evaluative congruity, to the context of destination image and visitor satisfaction. Here, there is "a comparison between performance expectancy (perceived image of a destination) and performance outcome (perceived reality of the destination)" (Chon, 1990, p. 5). When the experience at the destination is greater than expectations, this is known as positive incongruity and results in the highest amount of satisfaction (Chon, 1990). Positive/negative congruity occurs when positive (or negative) expectations match those of experiences and results in a neutral state or a moderate level of satisfaction (when expectations and travel experiences are both positive) or dissatisfaction (when expectations and travel experiences are both negative) (Chon, 1990). The highest amount of dissatisfaction occurs when the experience at the

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destination is less than original expectations, which is known as negative incongruity (Chon, 1990). Like expectancy disconfirmation theory, there has been support for evaluative congruity theory in previous tourism research (Chon & Olsen, 1991).

Others have advocated that factors other than expectations influence visitor satisfaction. Some have acknowledged the role of perceived value in influencing satisfaction (Cronin, Brady, & Hult 2000; Parasuraman & Grewal 2000). Perceived value is considered “an individual, cognitive-affective evaluation of the product or service that occurs in the purchasing process and is based on a comparison between the benefits and costs arising out of the offer and the offers of competitors in the market” (Pandža Bajš, 2015, p. 124). Perceived value also, “varies with the changing circumstances of time, place, and situation in which the assessment is made” (Pandža Bajš, 2015, p. 124). According to Chen and Tsai (2007), destination image will influence trip quality (on-site experiences), which will in turn influence perceived value. Perceived value, then, influences satisfaction, and satisfaction subsequently influences behavioural intentions. The role of perceived values in influencing satisfaction has been found in additional tourism studies (Pandža Bajš, 2015; Prebensen, Woo, & Chen, 2013).

Still, the importance performance analysis model (IPA) identifies that satisfaction is not only derived from the performance of a product or service, but also the importance the consumer places on its various components (Martilla & James, 1977). To illustrate, a destination’s attributes (e.g., accommodations, food and beverage, attractions, etc.) could be placed into one of four categories by travelers: 1) concentrate here: importance is high, but performance is low (resulting in dissatisfaction); 2) keep up the good work: both importance and performance are high (resulting in satisfaction); 3) low priority: low importance and performance; and 4) possible overkill: importance is low, but performance is high (Martilla & James, 1977). Here, then, it is

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possible that while performance could be low, it may not necessarily result in dissatisfaction if a traveler does not deem the attribute to be important. Conversely, it is also possible that high performance may not result in positively influencing satisfaction if the attribute is not viewed as being important to the traveler.

Given the models of satisfaction outlined, an alternative approach has been proposed which goes beyond the notion of satisfaction being primarily based on cognitive assessments, and advocates that there is not only a cognitive component, but also an affective component to satisfaction. The affective component of satisfaction has been identified in consumer satisfaction research (Spreng et al., 1996), specifically the role of emotions (Phillips & Baumgartner, 2002), and includes research in the tourism context (Bigné et al., 2005; Bowen & Clarke, 2002; del Bosque & San Martín, 2008). Here, it is acknowledged that both cognitive evaluations, such as expectations, and affective (emotional) responses influence satisfaction (Oliver, 1993).

According to Mano and Oliver (1993), satisfaction “does not respond as a pure affect nor does it exist in the absence of feeling. It is apparently a complex human response with both cognitive and affective components” (p. 465). In the context of tourism, then, satisfaction is considered “an individual’s cognitive-affective state derived from a tourist experience” (del Bosque & San Martín, 2008, p. 553).

Inspired by the combined cognitive and affective model developed by Oliver (1993), and subsequently modified to reflect the findings from their own research, del Bosque and San Martín (2008) developed the cognitive-affective model of tourist satisfaction which will serve as the theoretical framework to guide this research. Unlike other models, satisfaction is influenced by both expectations and emotions experienced during a trip. To elaborate, expectations are influenced by one’s image of a destination (del Bosque & San Martín, 2008), since a mental

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representation of a place helps travelers anticipate future experiences (Jenkins, 1999). In addition, destination image also influences loyalty, as “A favourable preconceived image of the place will have a positive effect on the individual’s beliefs of a future experience. Under these circumstances, the destination will occupy a privileged position in the individual’s choice process” (del Bosque & San Martín, 2008, p. 566). Moreover, “a positive representation will reinforce the tourist’s commitment to the destination” (del Bosque & San Martín, 2008, p. 566). From here, expectations influence positive emotions experienced during a visit, as beliefs can influence certain affective states (Oliver & Westbrook, 1993), and expectations also influence satisfaction due to the Assimilation Theory, since “[i]ndividuals suffer a psychological conflict when they perceive discrepancies between performance and prior beliefs... Tourists will reduce the psychological conflict and will validate their decisions to visit the place by adjusting the perception to their beliefs” (del Bosque & San Martín, 2008, p. 555). Disconfirmation influences positive or negative emotions one experiences during a trip due to the Theories of Appraisal, which “establish that individuals’ emotions are influenced by their evaluations and interpretations of an event” (del Bosque & San Martín, 2008, p. 556). These emotions in turn, in addition to expectations, influence satisfaction, in that emotions resonate with travelers when they recollect their trip experiences (del Bosque & San Martín, 2008) and are accessible for travelers to incorporate into their satisfaction evaluations (Cohen & Areni, 1991). Finally, satisfaction as well as positive emotions experienced during the trip influence loyalty towards the destination, including the intention to visit again and/or recommending it to others (Bigné et al., 2005; Bigné et al., 2001; del Bosque & San Martín, 2008; Kozak & Rimmington, 2000; Lee et al., 2005; Yoon & Uysal, 2005). del Bosque and San Martín’s cognitive-affective model of tourist satisfaction (2008) is illustrated in Figure 4.

Given del Bosque and San Martín’s (2008) cognitive-affective model of tourist satisfaction to inform the research process, it is necessary to consider next how the study took place. Namely, what methods were employed and why, and the epistemology, theoretical perspective, and methodology that guided the use of such methods. With this, and an expansion on the participants and study site investigated, the study’s methodology will be outlined next.

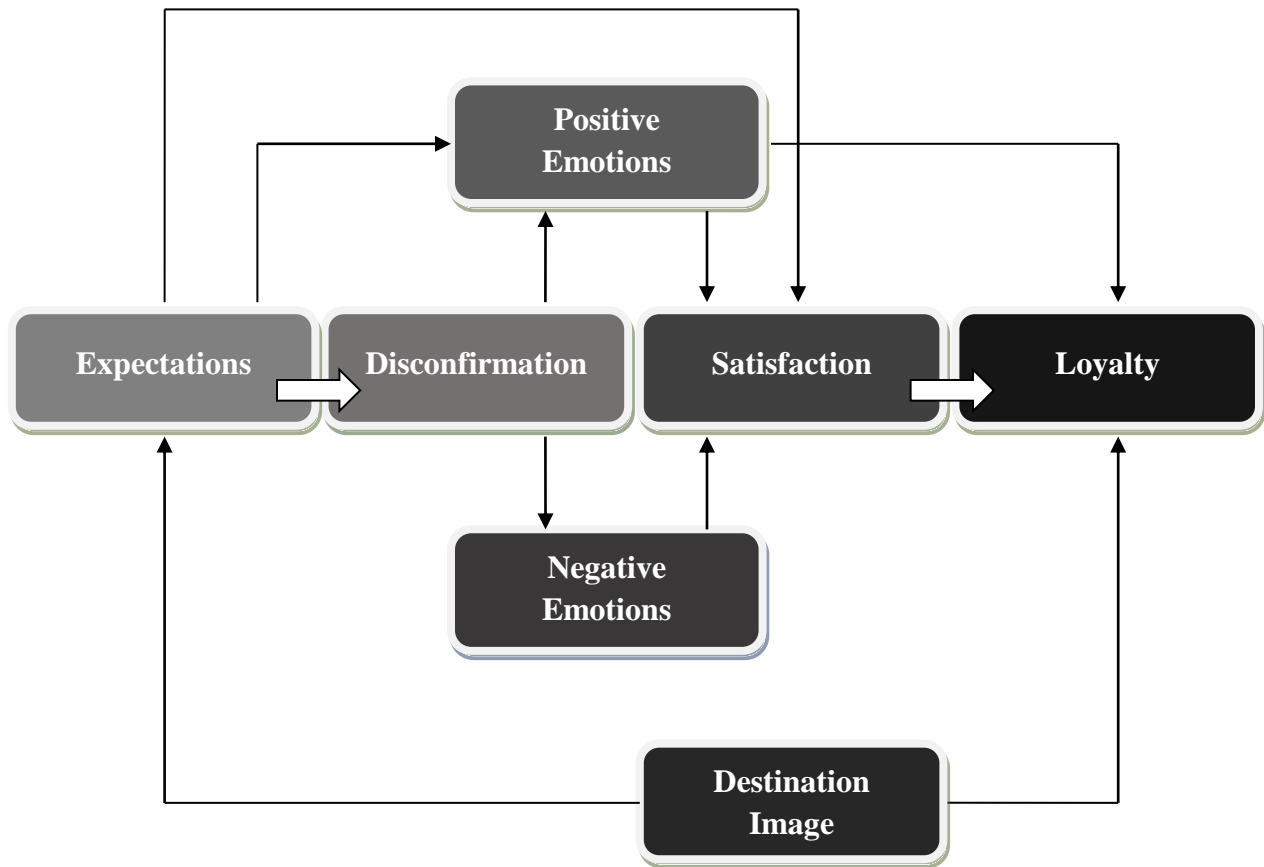


Figure 4. A cognitive-affective model of tourist satisfaction. From “Tourist satisfaction: A cognitive-affective model,” by I. R. del Bosque and H. San Martín, 2008, *Annals of Tourism Research*, 35(2), p. 564. Copyright 2008 by Elsevier Ltd. Reprinted with permission.

Chapter III: Methodology

This section will begin by identifying the epistemological approach and theoretical perspective which guided this research. Then, the study's methodology, qualitative survey, and justification for its use in this research will be outlined. A description of the methods employed, interviews, as well as the data analysis process and timeline for the study will follow. An overview of the participants recruited, based on criterion sampling, will proceed thereafter. Lastly, a profile of the study site, Churchill, Manitoba, will conclude the methodology section.

Epistemology

The epistemological approach that guides this research is constructionism. According to Crotty (1998), constructionism is the view that “all knowledge, and therefore all meaningful reality as such, is contingent upon human practices, being constructed in and out of interaction between human beings and their world, and developed and transmitted within an essentially social context” (p. 42). This suggests that objects are viewed differently among us, even if we are referring to the same object. For example, the term “polar bear” likely holds different meanings for residents of Churchill, tourists, and tourism operators. Here, “meanings are constructed by human beings as they engage with the world they are interpreting” (Crotty, 1998, p. 43). In other words, objects that exist in our world and their meanings are learned and therefore we create varying viewpoints towards them.

Theoretical Perspective

Interpretivism is the “philosophical stance” (Crotty, 1998) that I have about the world which guides my research. Crotty (1998) describes the interpretivist approach as that which “looks for culturally derived and historically situated interpretations of the social-life world” (p. 67). This philosophy stems from the belief that “certitude and objectivity cannot be sustained

and that the findings of natural science are themselves social constructions and human interpretations” (Crotty, 1998, p. 71). To elaborate, the interpretivist perspective argues that the nature of reality exists in individuals’ thoughts and perceptions and is constructed by individual understandings which are shared (Crotty, 1998). In addition, humans create meaning in different ways and human nature changes over time (Creswell, 2013; Crotty, 1998).

As a result, those who conduct research from an interpretivist approach typically attempt to understand how individuals experience and make sense of the world (Creswell, 2013). This goal, as well as my assumptions and viewpoint of the world, informed my methodological approach to my research via qualitative survey methodology.

Methodology

According to Jansen (2010), “qualitative survey [research] analyses the diversity of member characteristics within a population” (p. 1). Unlike quantitative surveys which aim at establishing frequencies, qualitative surveys seek to determine “meaningful variation” within the population of interest (Jansen, 2010). Specifically, “a survey is a qualitative survey if it does not count the frequencies of categories (values), but searches for the empirical diversity in the properties of members, even if these properties are expressed in numbers” (Jansen, 2010, p. 4).

The knowledge aim of my research question justifies the use of the qualitative survey design as my methodology: How does social media influence visitor satisfaction? The knowledge aim consists of the topic studied, which is how satisfaction is influenced by pre-trip destination image which has been shaped by social media content. Then, it includes the aspect of the topic studied, which is diversity in satisfaction based on pre-trip destination image which has been influenced by social media content. Next, the knowledge aim consists of the empirical domain covered, which is tourists visiting Churchill during the peak tourism season. Lastly, it

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includes the unit observed, which consists of members of the Churchill tourist population (Jansen, 2010). My primary knowledge aim is to “explore the views of participants as expressed in their own words” (Jansen, 2010, p. 7), which is achieved under this methodological approach. For the study, I implemented an open (inductive) qualitative survey research design, where relevant topics, dimensions, and categories were identified through interpretation of raw data as opposed to defining these entities beforehand as is done in a pre-structured (deductive) qualitative survey format (Jansen, 2010). As this methodology supports the integrity of the subjective nature of the tourism experience, the research method for my study consisted of interviews, a method typically used in qualitative survey research (Jansen, 2010).

Methods

Interviews. In line with the qualitative survey research approach and the purposes of my research, it was reasonable to employ interviews as the study’s research method. Specifically, semi-structured interviews were chosen as they allowed for the collection of relevant data with the use of an interview guide (Appendix A) while permitting dialogue with participants. This provided the opportunity to collect additional, meaningful data that may have not been captured via the formal interview guide questions.

Interviews were selected as the most appropriate research method for this study because one’s image of a destination is inherently subjective, and therefore subsequent satisfaction with trip experiences (based on pre-trip expectations) would be based on varying destination images among participants. As a qualitative research method, interviews serve as a medium to not only provide an opportunity to better understand how social media influences satisfaction from the tourist’s perspective, but better allows for the discovery of multiple perspectives from tourists (Creswell, 2013), which can be limited when using quantitative methods such as surveys.

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The interview guide consisted of open-ended questions, which included asking visitors to describe their pre-trip image of Churchill, pre-trip expectations, loyalty towards visiting Churchill, disconfirmation of visitor experiences, the emotions experienced while visiting Churchill, visitor satisfaction, and loyalty towards Churchill post-trip. These questions were included in the interview guide to gather information from participants to use towards the development of themes regarding how social media content influenced satisfaction. Questions regarding social media use, including when participants used social media during the pre-trip phase of travel (when dreaming about, planning, booking trips), the types of social media applications used (Facebook, Twitter, etc.), and the type of information viewed on social media (attractions, accommodations, food and beverage, etc.) were included in the interview guide to assist in determining the role that social media played in influencing destination image. In addition, questions with respect to where social media content came from (organic and/or induced information sources) and what additional information sources were consulted during the pre-trip phase of travel (WOM, television, books, etc.) comprised part of the interview guide, as different images of the same destination can be projected in the case of the former (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999; Beerli & Martín, 2004; Choi et al., 2007; Leung et al., 2011; Schmallegger et al., 2010; Stepchenkova & Zhan, 2013), and destination image can be influenced by the latter. General questions regarding visitor characteristics such as a traveler's country of origin, alternative destinations evaluated during the pre-trip phase of travel, and the duration of time spent trip planning were included in the interview guide to acknowledge personal factors that can influence destination image (e.g., duration of time spent trip planning can influence familiarity with the destination). In addition, information regarding other destinations visited on the trip and the amount of time spent in Churchill was gathered, as these can influence visitors' emotions and

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subsequent satisfaction with trip experiences (e.g., a length of stay which is too long may result in experiencing negative emotions, such as boredom). Participants were also asked what they saw/did while they were in Churchill to reveal motivations for visiting the destination. At the end of the interview, participants were asked if they had additional comments in order to gather information towards theme development that may have not been captured during the interview.

Interviews were expected to take 20-30 minutes to complete. It was anticipated that this would allow participants to meaningfully answer the questions while helping to ensure that the time to commit to an interview was not too long to the extent that most would not be willing to participate. The interviews that took place ranged from 15-45 minutes in duration, with an average interview time of 26 minutes and a median time of 24.5 minutes.

Data analysis. Data analysis broadly consisted of preparing and organizing the data (transcripts from audio interviews), coding and reducing the data into meaningful themes and combining the codes into broader categories, and then presenting the data in the form of a discussion. To begin, once the data had been organized and the audio interviews had been transcribed, I read the interview transcripts in their entirety, taking notes consisting of initial ideas and key concepts that seemed relevant in the process. These ideas and concepts included: a) participants used social media during the pre-trip phase of travel in a variety of ways; b) additional information sources played a role during the pre-trip phase of travel; c) participants had a prominent image of wildlife in Churchill before visiting; d) social media content influenced expectations, but its influence varied; e) social media helped contribute to participants' loyalty towards Churchill; f) participants expressed positive disconfirmation (exceeded expectations) in regards to their visitor experiences; g) participants expressed experiencing positive emotions during their visits; h) participants were satisfied with their trip

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experiences; and i) participants indicated loyalty to Churchill after their visit (would visit again, recommend it to others).

Next, I organized the data into codes/categories and themes that were identified through the interpretation of the interview transcripts. Coding the data consisted of “aggregating the text or visual data into small categories of information, seeking evidence for the code from different databases being used in the study, and then assigning a label to the code” (Creswell, 2013, p. 184). In the context of my methodological approach, this involved differentiating the diversity of experiences conveyed by participants in the interviews. Specifically, I identified text in the interview transcripts that appeared to reveal how viewing social media content during the pre-trip phase of travel influenced destination image and expectations, and subsequently influenced visitor satisfaction. As there were data to suggest that social media influenced image/expectations among participants in varying ways, the following categories were developed: 1) the influence of social media on visitor satisfaction based on a) the influence of social media on image/expectations; b) the role of WOM versus eWOM/UGC in influencing image/expectations; and c) the influence of other sources on image/expectations.

Then, the analysis process included developing significant statements and grouping them by commonality into categories, or themes, that “consist of several codes aggregated to form a common idea” (Creswell, 2013, p. 186). There was evidence from the interview transcripts which suggested that the influence of social media content on image/expectations varied among participants, and therefore how social media would contribute to satisfaction among participants would be different. Based on this, I categorized my themes to acknowledge the differences in how social media content influenced image/expectations for participants. The final themes, then, consisted of the following: 1) viewing social media content before travel can influence

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expectations, where a) it can reveal new information about a destination and subsequently influence expectations; and b) it can influence expectations based on one's pre-existing image of Churchill; then 2) WOM is greater than eWOM/UGC, in that a) travelers vet eWOM/UGC when viewing it before their trips; and b) WOM is an important resource when planning a trip; and lastly 3) destination image of Churchill originates outside of social media, where a) wildlife is a prominent component of image of Churchill; and b) other sources shape image of Churchill.

From here, I interpreted the data, which involves “abstracting out beyond the codes and themes to the larger meaning of the data” (Creswell, 2013, p. 187). The larger meaning of the data that I found was that social media will influence satisfaction differently among travelers depending on how social media influences expectations. This led to my discussion of the findings, which consists of a summary of the diversity of participant experiences and the themes identified, supported by quotations from the interview transcripts.

Timeline. Interviews took place from August 8-19 of 2016 during the beluga whale tourism season in Churchill. I transcribed the interviews thereafter, which was completed in November 2016. In January 2017, I began reading over the transcripts, noting ideas/key concepts, and in February 2017 I organized the data into codes/categories and themes. In March 2017, I began interpreting the data and subsequently recording my findings beginning in May 2017. In August 2017, I began my draft submissions and presented the data in the form of a discussion during my thesis defense in August 2018.

Participants

To conduct interviews, purposeful sampling, where “the inquirer selects individuals and sites for study because they can purposely inform an understanding of the research problem and central phenomenon in the study” (Creswell, 2013, p. 156) was used to recruit participants from

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a population sample consisting of all tourists visiting Churchill during the time frame data collection took place. Specifically, criterion sampling was employed for quality assurance, as it was essential that participants met the criteria of: a) viewing social media content of Churchill and its attributes before their trip; and b) completing the during the trip phase of the travel cycle, allowing for reflection on satisfaction based on pre-trip expectations.

To ensure rigour and integrity in the study, credibility was strived for by using “tactics to help ensure honesty in informants when contributing data” (Shenton, 2004, p. 66). Participants were informed that there were no right or wrong answers to questions, so they did not feel compelled to answer in a certain way. Participants were also told that their participation in the study was voluntary and they could withdraw at any time, which helps ensure that participation is genuine (Shenton, 2004). In addition, member checks were used where participants were asked to read over their interview transcripts to verify that what they said is in fact what they intended (Shenton, 2004). As well, “reflective commentary” and evaluating the project as it developed was also applied in the study, which includes assessing effectiveness of techniques and “may also be used to record the researcher’s initial impressions of each data collection session, patterns appearing to emerge in the data collected and theories generated” (Shenton, 2004, p. 68), which can help monitor developing constructions on the part of the researcher.

An additional approach to ensure the integrity of qualitative research consists of starting with some data collection, analyzing these data, developing preliminary concepts/categories, collecting additional data and so on until data saturation of concepts/categories is reached (Jansen, 2010). This helps determine the number of participants needed in the study as, once the researcher feels that there are no longer any new concepts emerging from the interviews that are relevant to the study, they can move on from collecting data and proceed with analysis. Due to

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pragmatic reasons related to collecting data in Churchill however, the study required using a “one-shot” approach which involves a linear format of collecting data, analyzing them, and providing a summary of the findings (Jansen, 2010), making it difficult to know when data saturation would be reached while collecting data in Churchill. Although there is limited research on social media and tourism where interviews have been used as a study method, research conducted in the social sciences has found that data saturation can occur after 12 interviews (Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006). Morrow (2005) agrees that 12 interviews can be sufficient, but would suggest conducting up to 20 or 30. Still, Morse (2000) argues that there are a number of factors involved in determining the number of participants needed for a study:

Estimating the number of participants in a study required to reach saturation depends on a number of factors, including the quality of the data, the scope of the study, the nature of the topic, the amount of useful information obtained from each participant, the number of interviews per participant, the use of shadowed data, and the qualitative method and study design used. (p. 3)

Given the challenges of reaching data saturation using a one-shot approach, I interviewed 20 participants for this study, conducting more interviews than were believed to be necessary to compensate for potential setbacks during data collection without compromising the potential for achieving saturation. Of the 20 interviews conducted, three participants did not meet the criteria of viewing social media content before their trip and consequently these interviews were dropped from analysis. This was discovered during the interviews when probing for the types of information sources travelers viewed during the pre-trip phase of travel (dreaming about/planning the trip). In addition, one participant did not appear to genuinely participate in

the study, and therefore their interview was also dropped from analysis. Given this, 16 participant interviews which met the criteria of the study remained and were used in analysis.

Study Site

Churchill is a town of close to 900 people (Statistics Canada, 2016) situated along the Hudson Bay in the far north of Manitoba, Canada. As a northern supply centre and military base during WWII, Churchill continued to serve as a rocket launching site until the mid-1980s (Historica Canada, 2012), and where the former site stands is now home to the Churchill Northern Studies Centre, a non-profit research and education facility. With unsuccessful attempts of developing a sustainable ocean port, ecotourism has played an important role in supporting Churchill's economy. Like other Canadian arctic communities that project an image of wilderness and scenery (Milne, Grekin, & Woodley, 1998), Churchill is renowned for its mega fauna including polar bears that inhabit the area in the fall and beluga whales that congregate in the Churchill River estuary during the summer months. As a polar destination, Churchill serves as a viewing place for the Aurora borealis (northern lights) in the winter, and there are also dog sledding/carting opportunities available as well as seasonal bird watching.

Exit interviews took place at the Churchill Airport and Churchill train station when travelers were leaving the destination to return home after they had fulfilled their travel experiences. The Churchill Airport and Churchill train station were chosen as the sites to recruit participants and conduct interviews as the travel experiences were most recent as tourists were leaving Churchill. A weakness of previous studies includes participants being asked to recall their last vacation, up to 12 months earlier, which can be difficult for travelers to do when a significant amount of time has already passed. In addition, the airport and train station also

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served as settings that allowed for better recruitment opportunities, as it could have been difficult to track down potential participants after they had left the destination and arrived home.

Chapter IV: Findings

This section will begin by outlining participant characteristics and describing how participants used social media during the pre-trip phase of travel. This will provide a basis for identifying the study's main themes: 1) viewing social media content before travel can influence satisfaction, in that a) it can reinforce or modify image and subsequently influence expectations; but b) travelers vet social media content when viewing it before their trip, which may influence the extent to which social media influences trip expectations; and 2) the influence of social media on destination image and subsequent satisfaction will differ, in that a) the role of social media during the pre-trip phase of travel varies among travelers, and b) information sources other than social media influence destination image.

Participant Characteristics

The participants in this study who visited Churchill were from Manitoba (Winnipeg (n=8), Thompson (n=1), Lac du Bonnet (n=1)), Saskatchewan (n=1), the United States (n=3), and the United Kingdom (n=2, one of whom is currently living in Papa New Guinea). Both participants visiting from overseas and one of the participants from Winnipeg visited multiple destinations in addition to Churchill on their trip, while the remaining participants from Manitoba (Winnipeg, Thompson, Lac du Bonnet) and the participant from Saskatchewan only visited Churchill on this trip, except for one participant from Winnipeg who stayed in Thompson while traveling to/from Churchill. The remaining three participants from the United States stayed in Winnipeg as part of their trips. Participants stayed in Churchill for between 2 and 7 days (two days (n=4), three days (n=6), four days (n=3), five days (n=2), and seven days (n=1)). Eleven participants did not consider any other destinations to visit during the pre-trip phase of their visit to Churchill, while one considered visiting Nunavut, two considered Alaska, one

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considered Iceland, and one considered visiting Norway. The time participants started planning their trip to Churchill in advance was less than a week (n=1), less than a month (n=1), 1-2 months (n=1), 3-6 months (n=6), 7-11 months (n=2), one year (n=4), and over one year (2.5 years, n=1). While a question regarding who participants were traveling with was not asked during the interviews, participants appeared to be traveling with their partner (n=8), family (n=4), a tour group (n=3), with a co-worker (n=1), and as part of a university/college (n=1), with one of the participants appearing to have traveled with both his family and with a tour group.

Every participant took part in a beluga whale watching excursion. The methods of the excursions included boat (n=7), kayak (n=10), and snorkelling (n=4). Some participants did more than one beluga excursion; three participants did both a boat tour and a kayaking tour, and one participant did both a kayaking tour and a snorkelling tour. One participant went on a boat tour and went snorkelling twice to view the belugas. Additional activities included Tundra Buggy tours for polar bear viewing (n=5), dog carting (n=4), visiting the Fort Prince of Wales (n=4), the Itsanitaq (Eskimo) Museum (n=7), the Visitor Information Centre/train station (n=4), the SS Ithaka (n=6), the Miss Piggy plane wreck (n=6), the Churchill Northern Studies Centre (n=8), Cape Mary (n=3), the rocket range (n=2), the town centre complex (n=2), the Dene Monument (n=1) and Ramsey Lake (n=1). Five participants also took part in a flora and fauna tour, and three participants did a cultural tour of Churchill.

The Role of Social Media in the Pre-Trip Phase of the Travel Process

Of the 16 participants, 12 viewed TripAdvisor before visiting Churchill, making it the most popular social media site that was viewed during the pre-trip phase of the travel process, followed by YouTube (n=5) and Facebook (n=4). Additional social media sites viewed before traveling to Churchill included Twitter (n=1), Instagram (n=1), and Wikipedia (n=1). Among

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the participants, 10 viewed only one social media site, four viewed two social media sites, and two participants viewed three social media sites before visiting Churchill. Of the 10 participants who viewed only one social media site, six viewed TripAdvisor, three viewed YouTube, and one viewed Wikipedia before traveling to Churchill. The four participants who viewed two social media sites viewed TripAdvisor and YouTube (n=2), and TripAdvisor and Facebook (n=2), and the two participants who viewed three social media sites viewed TripAdvisor, Facebook, and Twitter (n=1), and TripAdvisor, Facebook, and Instagram (n=1) before visiting Churchill. The participants viewed social media content before traveling to Churchill on a variety of topics, including beluga whale watching (n=7), polar bear viewing (n=4), information/reviews of dog carting excursions (n=1), information/reviews of the Itsanitaq (Eskimo) Museum (n=2), information/reviews of the Visitor Information Centre/train station (n=1), information on SS Ithaka (n=1), information/reviews of accommodations (n=7), information/reviews on food and beverage services (n=4), information/reviews of transportation options to and from Churchill (n=2), information on activities to do in Churchill (n=4), amenities available in Churchill (n=1), the Churchill Airport jewelry shop (n=1), and a friend's Facebook page with their trip to Churchill (n=1). UGC (including eWOM) was viewed by all but one participant before traveling to Churchill, making the organic information source the most widely viewed type of social media content for participants. Specifically, 10 participants viewed social media content only containing UGC, one participant viewed social media content from a tourism operator (induced information source), and five participants viewed both UGC and social media content from induced information sources including tourism operators, restaurants, and DMOs. From what participants could recall, all viewed social media content during the planning phases of the travel process, with only one of them indicating that they had also viewed social media while they were

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dreaming of visiting Churchill one day. Additional information sources participants used during the pre-trip phase of the travel process were WOM (n=13), websites (n=10), internet search (n=9), books (n=3), television (n=2), online photos/videos (n=2), newspapers (n=1), and previous experience visiting Churchill (n=3). A summary of the participants and their social media use before traveling to Churchill is outlined in Table 1.

Visitor Satisfaction

Regardless of which social media sites they viewed before traveling, how many social media sites they viewed, what information they viewed on social media, and whether the social media content was organic or induced, all participants expressed satisfaction with their visitor experiences in Churchill. For example, one participant watched whale watching excursions on YouTube before visiting Churchill. When reflecting on her trip, Laura said,

“Yeah, supreme happiness. You know, like, I don’t know what emotion you associate with, like, fulfilling your dreams, but like I’ve always wanted to be here. Just, even more excellent than I had hoped it would be.”

Another participant watched YouTube videos and read TripAdvisor reviews of whale watching excursions before visiting Churchill. When asked about her trip, Sandra said,

“I honestly thought, “Churchill, oh it’d be cool to see”. But, like I seriously, it’s changed my life... Like, I’m blown away. Like, I will tell everybody I know... It’s like, it gives me goosebumps talking about it. It was just fantastic.”

Another participant also watched YouTube videos of whale watching excursions, as well as read TripAdvisor reviews regarding transportation to Churchill, before visiting. When asked about his trip, William said,

“A few days up here, I mean... I don’t think there’s an equivalent anywhere else?”

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Table 1

Participants' Social Media Use Prior to Traveling to Churchill

Participant	Types of Social Media Viewed Pre-Trip	Information Viewed on Social Media Pre-Trip	Organic/ Induced
Tim	TripAdvisor	Polar Bear Viewing, Itsanitaq Museum, Visitor Information Centre/Train Station	Organic
Pam	Wikipedia	SS Ithaka	Organic
Nancy	Facebook, TripAdvisor	Accommodations, Activities, Churchill Airport Jewelry Shop	Organic
Laura	YouTube	Beluga Whale Watching	Organic
Ian	TripAdvisor	Polar Bear Viewing, Accommodations	Organic
Clare	TripAdvisor	Accommodations, Activities	Organic
Brad	YouTube	Transportation	Organic
Judy	Facebook, Instagram, TripAdvisor	Polar Bear Viewing, Accommodations, Food and Beverage, Activities, Friend's Facebook Page	Both
Elizabeth	Facebook, TripAdvisor	Beluga Whale Watching, Accommodations, Food and Beverage	Both
Sandra	YouTube, TripAdvisor	Beluga Whale Watching, Food and Beverage	Both
Tara	TripAdvisor	Activities	Organic
William	YouTube, TripAdvisor	Beluga Whale Watching, Transportation	Organic
Patricia	TripAdvisor	Beluga Whale Watching, Polar Bear Viewing, Accommodations, Amenities	Both
David	TripAdvisor	Dog Carting Excursions	Organic
Walter	YouTube	Beluga Whale Watching	Induced
Joseph	Facebook, Twitter, TripAdvisor	Beluga Whale Watching, Itsanitaq Museum, Accommodations, Food and Beverage	Both

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Another participant read TripAdvisor reviews of activities to do in Churchill before visiting.

During her interview, Tara also appeared to express satisfaction, despite having to take part in larger group excursions which she did not seem to prefer:

“It’s completely one of the greatest places that we’ve ever stayed... But... I think... The only thing that, you know, kind of just doing a big group activity that you have to do here obviously, in terms of what is on offer... You know, it’s just I struggle with large groups sometimes... And so, therefore that be a bit frustrating sometimes. But in terms of wildlife, what we’ve seen and what Churchill’s given us, then fantastic.”

Like Tara, other participants appeared to indicate satisfaction by referring to their encounters with wildlife while they were visiting Churchill. For instance, one participant viewed TripAdvisor reviews of accommodations and excursions before her trip. When describing her visit to Churchill at one point, Clare said,

“The belugas were so amazing. Like, I expected to see them, but I didn’t expect the level of interaction and the length of time they interacted with us was really incredible.”

Another participant watched a wildlife video via a Facebook advertisement and read reviews on TripAdvisor regarding restaurants and accommodations in Churchill before her trip. During her interview, Elizabeth said,

“I was getting pretty excited on the boat (laughs)! I was like, “WOW, they’re so cool!” I mean, there were like hundreds of them. They had their babies and stuff. It was really, really neat... Yeah, so, yeah that was super cool. Like, I wouldn’t miss that for the world.”

Another participant read TripAdvisor reviews of Seal River Lodge (accommodations, restaurant, excursions, etc.) before visiting Churchill. When asked about her trip, Patricia said,

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“Swimming with belugas was, you know, just off the charts. It’s like, you know, nirvana. You’re just floating there and they’re coming up to you and...”

Another participant viewed Facebook, Twitter, and TripAdvisor – including content on beluga whale watching excursions – when dreaming about and planning his trip to Churchill. When reflecting on his trip, Joseph said,

“The fact that we did actually get to go and see the whales and have the belugas all around us, that was fantastic. So, you know, I think just that alone, yeah for sure I would say it exceeded expectations because it couldn’t be, you know, it’s a fantastic experience, so it couldn’t be any other way, right?”

Based on the positive responses, participants appeared to be satisfied with their trip to Churchill, some of whom referred to certain aspects of their trip when describing their satisfaction.

Despite participants’ satisfaction states, social media may have not contributed significantly towards satisfaction for some of the participants in this research. Although the findings indicate that social media content helped contribute to expectations, participants also seemed to value WOM when planning their trips, yet vetted UGC and eWOM. In addition, it appeared that destination image of Churchill largely originated outside of social media for participants. The remainder of this chapter, then, will outline the following main themes revealed from the findings: 1) social media can contribute to expectations; but 2) WOM is valued whereas UGC and eWOM is vetted; and 3) destination image of Churchill originates outside of social media.

Theme 1: Social Media Can Contribute to Expectations

For participants in this research, their interview responses suggest that social media’s primary purpose was to gather information and help in trip planning after having made the

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decision to visit Churchill. In the process, some of the participants found out new information about Churchill that they had not known about previously, which helped contribute to their expectations of the destination. Social media content also helped further influence participants' existing image of wildlife in the area, which helped subsequently influence expectations. This section, then, has been divided into two subthemes: 1a) social media can reveal new information about a destination; and 1b) social media can further contribute to existing image and subsequently influence expectations.

Subtheme 1a: social media can reveal new information about a destination. For participants in the study, social media helped reveal new information about Churchill, which in some instances appeared to contribute to expectations. For example, one participant read TripAdvisor reviews of attractions and excursions in Churchill before his trip. When asked about reading the reviews, Tim said,

[I] found out a little bit about, you know, like the museums, like the Eskimo Museum, and a little bit about, just knowing a bit more about whether there'd be any polar bears around and so on... There are the sort of options to do things, and actually seeing polar bears, you know, there's some recommendations like, you know, too early in the season, jump in a helicopter and that kind of stuff? Which was, you know, new information."

Based on his response, it appears that reading TripAdvisor reviews before visiting Churchill helped inform Tim about polar bear viewing opportunities in the summer (off-season), which he did not seem to know about beforehand.

Another participant visited Churchill as part of a geocaching group and viewed the group's Facebook page as well as reviews of accommodations on TripAdvisor before her trip. When asked about viewing Facebook before visiting Churchill, Nancy said,

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“Seeing from the Facebook posts... There was a lot to do in Churchill in the summer that I hadn’t really been aware of before we started discussing it... I always wanted to go in winter.”

Based on her response, it seems that viewing the Facebook group page revealed to Nancy that there were activities to do in Churchill in the summer that she had not known about previously.

Another participant viewed Facebook, Twitter, and TripAdvisor before visiting Churchill. When asked about viewing TripAdvisor reviews before his trip, Joseph said,

“When I started researching my trip on TripAdvisor, you know, I think one of the top things, and I can’t remember if it was number one, but one of the top things to do and see there was the Eskimo Museum. Which surprised me a little bit because I had never heard of the Eskimo Museum. And being kind of a number one thing, it was pretty impressive.”

Based on his response, it appears that TripAdvisor revealed a new component of Churchill to Joseph, which was the Itsanitaq (Eskimo) Museum. In addition, it appears that TripAdvisor influenced his expectations positively towards the museum.

Another participant watched YouTube videos and read TripAdvisor reviews of whale watching excursions before visiting Churchill. When asked about viewing TripAdvisor reviews before her trip, Sandra said,

“Like even the whales... That’s kind of why, when I was reading one of the TripAdvisor’s and they said, you know, they have safety zodiacs that are accompanying you... And I felt so safe... Blah blah blah, you know... And so that actually, it did make me, you know, think, “Well, maybe I’m going to try this” ... Do something that scares the hell out of you (laughs)! And try and do one thing. And that was it today!”

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Based on her response, it seems that viewing TripAdvisor reviews not only provided new information to Sandra about Churchill – that there are safety zodiacs accompanying whale watching excursions – but they also positively influenced her expectations and her decision to participate in an excursion.

Subtheme 1b: social media can further contribute to existing image and influence expectations. In addition to revealing new information, social media content also helped influence participants' expectations based on their pre-existing image of Churchill as a wildlife destination. For example, one participant watched whale watching excursions on YouTube before visiting Churchill. When asked about watching YouTube before her trip, Laura said,

“I watched a YouTube video of someone kayaking with belugas... To kind of know what to expect... I mean I just kind of wanted to know what we were going to see with the belugas... I saw a lot of belugas in the video and I thought, “Wow, that’s a lot more than I would have expected.”

Here, it appears that Laura already knew about the belugas in Churchill before watching the YouTube video, but the video helped contribute to her expectations regarding her whale watching experience while visiting.

Another participant also watched YouTube videos of beluga whale watching excursions before visiting Churchill. When asked about viewing the videos beforehand, Walter said,

“Yes I did [watch YouTube] ... Because I knew I was going to go and do the beluga thing... So I went and they have a beluga cam where there’s one on the boat and one underneath the water... Yeah, so... So I watched those... Of the what I was going to experience, you know? And how close you were going to get and that sort of thing... We’d be very, very close...”

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Based on his response, it seems that Walter also knew about the belugas before planning his trip, and the YouTube videos helped influence his expectations of what his beluga encounters would be like while on his excursion.

Another participant watched a wildlife video via a Facebook advertisement and read reviews on TripAdvisor regarding restaurants and accommodations in Churchill before her trip. When asked about watching the Facebook video, Elizabeth said,

“[The Facebook video is] what got me like, this is so cool! And then actually realizing like, how close you can get up to them, so...”

Based on her response, it appears that Elizabeth knew about the wildlife in Churchill beforehand, and viewing the Facebook video not only influenced her expectations of what her wildlife encounters would be like while visiting, but also further contributed to her image of Churchill, namely her affective image (i.e., emotional evaluations).

Another participant watched YouTube videos of whale watching excursions, as well as read TripAdvisor reviews regarding transportation to Churchill, before visiting. When asked about watching YouTube before his trip, William said,

“Watching the videos? Oh, I was pretty excited about it because I knew getting into the kayaks, you get a little bit closer in the... And you had a sense of more like, kind of autonomy, you know? I’m going to paddle over in this direction where I see some more... I’m just going to hang out right here, and I see them coming, so I’m going to maneuver my kayak and let them come to me? Those kinds of things. And you get a lot more of a, you can get away from everybody? And not hear all the people chattering? And just kind of take it in.”

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Like Elizabeth, it seems William knew about the belugas in Churchill before his trip and watching the YouTube videos not only helped influence his expectations of what his beluga whale watching experience would be like while he was visiting, but also influenced his emotional evaluations towards the experience.

Theme 2: WOM is Greater than eWOM/UGC

Despite the evidence that social media helped introduce new elements of the destination and influenced participants' expectations of Churchill, there were indicators which suggested that this may have not necessarily led to influencing visitor satisfaction. While social media content appeared to influence expectations, the value placed on eWOM and UGC when trip planning seemed somewhat limited. Moreover, WOM appeared to be more highly regarded in helping to inform participants about their trips. The mixed opinions towards eWOM/UGC and the favourable perception towards WOM comprise the two subthemes of this section.

Subtheme 2a: travelers vet eWOM/UGC on social media when planning their trips.

When viewing eWOM and/or UGC before their trips, some of the participants were critical of investing in what other travelers were posting on social media sites about their visitor experiences. For instance, one participant read TripAdvisor reviews of activities to do in Churchill before visiting. When asked about reading the reviews before her trip, Tara said,

“I take what everybody says like really light-heartedly, because what they would experience on their trip might not be what we get on our trip... So, I think what I take from there is just more how the tour operators operate, and how they treat you during that day or what you might get, rather than, you know, “Oh I saw this, I saw this”, because you know that that might not be the case.”

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While it appears that Tara found TripAdvisor reviews useful, her response suggests that she was reluctant in developing her trip expectations based on the experiences of other travelers.

Another participant read TripAdvisor reviews of Seal River Lodge before visiting Churchill. When asked about reading the reviews before her trip, Patricia said,

“People on social media are always going to say the most amazing part of their trip.

They’re not going to talk about the average stuff, so it’s... Yeah. You know, it’s hard to live up to because people see different wildlife at different times. And of course, when you look at other people’s experiences, you might get like, trip envy, you know... If we condensed the week into like, five moments, it would seem like the whole trip was, you know, highlight after highlight.”

Based on her response, Patricia also seemed hesitant about incorporating the experiences of other travelers on TripAdvisor when developing her trip expectations before visiting Churchill.

Another participant read TripAdvisor reviews of dog carting excursions before visiting Churchill. When asked about reading the reviews before his trip, David said,

“I read the reviews; like that’s what I’m interested in, what other people are saying.

Realizing that, to take it all with a grain of salt... [Looked at] some photos, yeah, but mainly... I think it was more about what people were saying. The pictures are always really good; no one’s going to put a bad picture up. So again, that’s skewed information.”

Although it appears that David found the TripAdvisor reviews useful when planning his trip, he also appeared to be critical of the role of UGC and its potential of projecting an overly positive image of Churchill.

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Despite the scrutiny placed on eWOM and UGC from some of the participants in the study, not all participants viewed them with the same critical lens. One participant watched whale watching excursions posted by other travelers on YouTube before visiting Churchill.

When asked about watching YouTube before her trip, Laura said,

“Like in the video, you know I always worry about any kind of like nature tourism that, you don’t want to hurt the animals, you don’t want to interfere with their habitat. It looked to me like, in that video, the people who were there, the tour that was operating them had prepped them on like, how to behave respectfully with the animals and not like, touch them or anything like that.”

While the context is different – watching a traveler’s YouTube video versus viewing photos/reviews from other travelers on TripAdvisor – Laura’s response suggests that travelers scrutinize eWOM/UGC in different ways when they view it on social media before their trips, as it appears she did invest in the YouTube content she viewed when developing expectations about her trip.

Subtheme 2b: WOM is words of wisdom. Participants’ mixed acceptance of eWOM/UGC contrasted with the importance that they placed on WOM when planning their trips. For instance, although one participant viewed Wikipedia of the SS Ithaka before her trip, she relied on WOM when making decisions regarding dog carting opportunities. When asked about making arrangements to go dog carting while in Churchill, Pam said,

“A friend of ours works in animal advocacy at the Humane Society? So, we kind of went through her because we know some places on... She said these are the guys to go through and who’s not.”

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Although it is possible that Pam did not find eWOM/UGC on social media regarding dog carting opportunities in Churchill when planning her trip, her response suggests that she found WOM useful when making decisions at least for this particular activity.

Another participant viewed Facebook, Instagram, and TripAdvisor before visiting Churchill. When asked about planning her trip, Judy said,

“Talked to, I mean, different people were going. Another guy from badminton was going, so we... We chatted back and forth about, you know, what he was doing. He was here the week before. And then just before I was leaving, I bumped into them at Superstore, and they were telling me, “Oh, don’t bother with just going out in the boat; you got to kayak with the belugas!” So I made some changes actually (laughs).”

Here, WOM helped influence Judy to make changes to her trip itinerary, namely her decision to go kayaking to view the belugas as opposed to viewing them from a zodiac.

Another participant relied on WOM when making his decision on where to stay in Churchill. When asked about making his accommodations decision, Ian said,

“I asked [my wife’s] cousin who lived here for a few years what the best accommodations were according to her. And I asked a few others. And I just picked the most popular answer.”

Despite reading reviews of accommodations on TripAdvisor before his trip, Ian’s response indicates that he ultimately relied on WOM to make his decision on where to stay in Churchill.

While there were participants in this study who relied on WOM when making decisions about their trip, it is worth noting that it did not necessarily influence all travel decisions. One participant viewed TripAdvisor reviews of restaurants and accommodations in Churchill before

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visiting, but relied on both WOM and UGC when making travel decisions. When asked about viewing accommodations on TripAdvisor before her trip, Elizabeth said,

“Yeah, [I looked at TripAdvisor] while we were thinking of like, Lazy Bear? But then [my husband] knew the guy through Calm Air so we stayed [at the Aurora Inn].”

Conversely, when asked about reading TripAdvisor reviews of restaurants in Churchill before visiting, Elizabeth said,

“For the restaurants and stuff? Like, kind of, [TripAdvisor is] pretty much how we decided where we were going to go.”

While it seems that WOM was a preferred information source when making travel decisions, as it influenced Elizabeth’s decision of accommodations over TripAdvisor, her response suggests that UGC is still useful to travelers when making decisions about their trips.

Theme 3: Destination Image of Churchill Largely Originates Outside of Social Media

While it may differ for other destinations, most of the participants in this research indicated that they used social media primarily when they were planning their visit to Churchill, with only one participant who could recall that they viewed social media content when also dreaming about visiting Churchill someday. Before planning their trips, some of the participants indicated that they already knew about Churchill as a destination renowned for its wildlife. Other participants acknowledged that other sources primarily contributed to their image of Churchill. As such, it is possible that satisfaction states were derived primarily from images and corresponding expectations outside of social media content. The prominent component of wildlife in destination image of Churchill and image derived from other sources comprise the final two subthemes revealed from the findings in this research.

Subtheme 3a: wildlife is a prominent component of image for Churchill. For some participants in the study, wildlife was a significant component of their destination image of Churchill before they viewed social media content when planning their trips. For instance, although Tim read TripAdvisor reviews of attractions and excursions in Churchill before visiting, he indicated that he already knew about Churchill as a wildlife destination from watching a television documentary:

“I already knew about Churchill from, like, wildlife documentaries and sort of... Seen a BBC documentary, so...”

Similarly, although Joseph had viewed content on Twitter regarding beluga whale watching excursions before his trip, he seemed to imply that he already knew about the wildlife in Churchill when he described his image of the destination during his interview:

“Certainly the wildlife stands out. You know, you hear about the polar bears and the belugas. It’s at the Hudson Bay and kind of far north... You know, being on the Hudson Bay, you know, where there were bears and belugas basically, you know... But the wildlife stands out as one of the things you can see there, right? So...”

Moreover, although Laura had watched whale watching excursions on YouTube before her trip, she appeared to have a long-standing image of wildlife in Churchill before she visited, which was reinforced while she would dream about visiting Churchill some day:

“Churchill has always been on my bucket list, so... I’ve been interested in Churchill for a long time. So you know, like whenever I think about, you know, go see some polar bears sometime in my life. And so, you know, I’ll be like, polar bear Tundra Buggy tour or something like that, you know, Churchill always comes up when you look for that. Obviously this wasn’t the season for that, but that was one of the things that caused me to

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be interested in Churchill in the first place. And so that's been like, every now and then I just click through pictures of polar bears... Even months ago, like years ago now."

Similarly, while he does not explicitly refer to wildlife, Brad seemed to have a long-standing image of Churchill as a wildlife destination when he gave the following response for how much time he spent planning his trip:

"[We started planning our trip] 25 years ago... It was always on our bucket list... So it was on our "to-do"? So it wasn't unknown to us; we knew we wanted to come to Churchill, just worked out this time that the stars aligned, so..."

Based on their responses, it would appear that, at least for some of the participants, wildlife was already a prominent attribute of image before they began planning their trip to Churchill.

Subtheme 3b: other sources shape destination image of Churchill. Although all the participants viewed social media content before their trip, some participants acknowledged that their image of Churchill stemmed from other sources. For instance, having viewed a Facebook group page of her geocaching group she was traveling with, as well as reviews of accommodations on TripAdvisor, Nancy said the following when describing her image of Churchill before her trip:

"I thought it would be isolated? I thought it would be limited. I thought it would be, cool animals though like polar bears and belugas. I knew that that would be here. I thought that there'd be more animal life that we would see easily? But we didn't. But I found out I wasn't right about a lot of those things like the isolation and stuff... I thought the restaurants would be very limited, and the hotels even? I thought they would be very bare and plain and inhospitable? But I found out that was incorrect. They're very, like I think there's a perception that it's the boonies? And it's not really."

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When asked what influenced her image of Churchill, Nancy replied,

“I used to live in Thompson, and it felt isolated? That was 20 years ago, so it’s changed a lot. I think I had past experience with the north, and things have changed a lot.”

Similarly, Sandra gave a brief but comparable response when describing her image of Churchill before her visit. When asked what her image of Churchill was like before her trip, Sandra said,

“Like, barren and cold.”

Although Sandra had read TripAdvisor reviews on whale watching excursions and restaurants before her trip, when she was asked what gave her that image of Churchill, Sandra replied,

“I just never really had, you know, explored it... And I never really thought about coming up here in the summer because I didn’t really think there was a whole lot to see? And I really was ill-informed!”

Joseph also referred to climate when describing his image of Churchill before his trip, and did not identify social media content as influencing this component of his image. When asked about his image of climate in Churchill before he visited, Joseph said,

“My impression was that it would be cool. Being summer that it would be, you know, 15 degrees-ish? Somewhere in that ball park. I guess my vision was kind of a sunny but cool place with lots of bugs. So, that’s kind of my vision of what, you know, it would be like, so...”

Although Joseph had viewed Facebook, Twitter, and TripAdvisor before his trip, when asked what gave him his image of the climate in Churchill, Joseph replied,

“I think it’s a general impression of what the north is like... So, you know, and it’s not even specific to Churchill. It’s that, you know, people who’ve gone, who are from Thompson or have gone to Thompson, or lived there, you know, often talk about the bugs

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and the cold, right? And so, Churchill, you know, Churchill's far away from Thompson, but still being a northern city, it was, you know, probably just kind of a guess or an assumption on my part that it would be colder than Winnipeg and have more bugs than Winnipeg."

In addition, Tara's image of Churchill seemed to have been constructed by other sources. When asked what her image of Churchill was like before she visited, Tara said,

"My image of Churchill before I came was exactly how the town looks... So exactly as the town is now, I imagined it... I expected the town; I didn't expect it to be teeming with so much wildlife... Like, you know, even, so the polar bears and the beluga whales, yes, but even when you go out or you walk out on the tundra with all the fauna and the flowers and the butterflies or the birds... So yeah, so it's, you know, it's kind of, yeah, full of life. But the town itself is exactly how I imagined it to be."

Although Tara had read TripAdvisor reviews on activities to do in Churchill before her trip, when she was asked what gave her this image of Churchill, she replied,

"I think probably what I read before, when I first heard about it. The polar bears and the beluga whales are what attracted us to it. And then, you read a little bit of the history and kind of, you know, trying to get this image up. So, yeah..."

Based on their responses, it appears that destination image of Churchill for these participants was influenced by other sources, despite viewing social media content before their trips.

Chapter V: Discussion

The research question guiding this study was: how does viewing social media content before visiting a destination influence satisfaction? There was some evidence to suggest that viewing social media before visiting Churchill contributed to destination image and expectations. It is possible, therefore, that viewing social media influenced visitor satisfaction in these instances. For participants in this research, social media introduced new information about Churchill, which in some instances appeared to influence expectations. In addition, social media not only appeared to influence expectations, but also contribute to affective image (emotional evaluations) of Churchill. This was primarily the case when participants viewed content pertaining to wildlife in the area.

The findings from this research also reveal that viewing social media content before visiting a place may not necessarily contribute towards expectations, or destination image for that matter, and therefore it may not contribute significantly to visitor satisfaction. Most participants in the study used social media when planning their trip to Churchill. Although they found eWOM and other forms of UGC on social media useful, some participants were reluctant in establishing their expectations based on the experiences of other travelers who had posted content regarding their visits on social media sites. Traditional WOM was also a valued resource for participants during the trip planning phase, and as such it may have had a greater influence on expectations for some participants than eWOM/UGC from social media. Participants also had a prominent image of Churchill as a wildlife destination prior to viewing social media content to plan their trips, and it is possible that visitor satisfaction was influenced by the expectations derived from these pre-existing images of Churchill. There were also participants who acknowledged that their image of Churchill was influenced by sources other than social media,

which suggests that their expectations may have been influenced by these other sources. The remainder of this chapter will expand on the themes identified in the research, beginning with the influence of social media on expectations.

Social Media Can Contribute to Expectations... Or Can It?

For participants in this study, viewing social media content before visiting Churchill introduced new information about the destination. There were participants who viewed eWOM and other forms of UGC on social media and found out, for instance, that Churchill offered tourism activities during the summer months and that it was not solely a winter tourism destination. Other participants discovered new aspects of Churchill when viewing relevant eWOM/UGC on social media, such as the Itsanitaq (Eskimo) Museum. The capacity for this type of content to reveal or introduce new aspects of a destination has been identified in previous research (Schmallegger et al., 2010). Moreover, there were participants who not only discovered new information about Churchill when viewing eWOM/UGC on social media before traveling, but the information helped inform and influence decisions regarding the trip, which has also been found to occur elsewhere (comScore, 2007; Crofton & Parker, 2012; Crowel et al., 2014; Tussyadiah & Fesenmaier, 2009).

Previous studies have identified that social media can project unique destination images (Leung et al., 2011; Schmallegger et al., 2010; Stepchenkova and Zhan, 2013), influence loyalty to a destination (Crowel et al., 2014; Lin & Huang, 2006; Tussyadiah & Fesenmaier, 2009; White, 2010), and influence travel decisions (comScore, 2007; Crofton & Parker, 2012; Crowel et al., 2014; Tussyadiah & Fesenmaier, 2009). The findings from this research reveal that social media content can also contribute to expectations. This is especially evident from the participants who viewed content regarding wildlife in Churchill before their trip. While they

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seemed to have already known about the wildlife in Churchill before planning their trip, the participants appeared to develop expectations in anticipation of their wildlife encounters based on the content they saw on social media. Notably, they commented on the quality of the experience (“that’s a lot more [belugas] than I would have expected”; “we’d be very, very close”), which appears to have positively contributed to expectations.

Interestingly, this was the case whether participants viewed videos that were user generated or if the videos were from a tourism organization. This raises questions regarding whether UGC has more credibility than traditional tourist information sources and is more trustworthy than tourism organizations such as the DMO, as has been acknowledged in previous research (Fotis et al., 2012; Gretzel, Yoo, & Purifoy, 2007; Schmallegger & Carson, 2008). It is possible that the influence of social media on expectations may have been implied in previous studies, as it would seem counter intuitive to make travel/purchase decisions without having at least some moderate amount of positive expectations towards the product or experience. Nevertheless, the findings from this study indicate that social media content can contribute to visitor expectations. However, because the findings are qualitative and thus not generalizable, further research is required to verify that travelers discern organic and induced information sources similarly to one another.

There was also evidence to suggest that social media content may have not influenced expectations for all the participants in this research. Some participants articulated a dismissal of eWOM, and to some extent other types of UGC, when viewing it before their trip. These were participants who expressed that the travel experiences of others are varied and subjective (“what they would experience on their trip might not be what we get on our trip”; “people see different wildlife at different times”), and that travelers who post to social media sites generally post

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positive content that could project a one-sided image of Churchill (“people on social media are always going to say the most amazing part of their trip”; “no one’s going to put a bad picture up”). These perceptions towards eWOM/UGC have been identified previously (Papathanassis & Knolle, 2011). Papathanassis and Knolle (2011) found that, among other things, content-related heuristics including perceived factuality and perceived neutrality of reviews can influence travel decisions. In this study, the participants refrained from investing in the narrative of other travelers who had visited Churchill, as they viewed it as being more subjective and less factual (perceived factuality). The participants were also suspicious of overly positive content that lacked criticism and perceived it as being exaggerated (perceived neutrality). Similar to the findings of Papathanassis and Knolle (2011), the participants instead appeared to primarily use eWOM/UGC to obtain facts about different aspects of the destination to inform decision making, such as which restaurants to visit while staying in Churchill. This, in conjunction with conveying skepticism towards eWOM/UGC posted to social media sites by other travelers (“I take what everybody says like really light-heartedly”; “take it all with a grain of salt”) would make it seem unlikely that the participants developed their trip expectations based on this content. The findings here, again, raise questions regarding the existing narrative in the literature with respect to organic and induced information sources. Like the perceptions towards eWOM/UGC by participants in the study, there is also often skepticism towards induced information sources, such as a DMO, as they typically project an attractive image consisting primarily of salient attributes when promoting their destinations/services (Gartner, 1994). Further research regarding the status of organic and induced information sources in the Web 2.0 era, therefore, is necessary.

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Given the findings discussed here, social media appeared to influence expectations for some participants while, based on the skeptical narrative towards social media content, likely did not influence expectations for other participants. It is important to consider what led to the differences. While it is difficult to generalize reasons due to the qualitative nature of the study, one possible explanation is that most of the participants whose expectations were influenced by social media viewed content of wildlife experiences, such as beluga whale watching, which may indicate this type of content is unique in its ability to influence expectations. Another explanation, however, may involve differences in participants' perceptions of reliability, credibility, and trustworthiness towards social media content, which resulted in the skepticism conveyed by some of the participants. This may explain why the findings of previous research have been conflicting. Some have suggested that social media content can be more reliable and more credible than traditional tourist information sources (Gretzel et al., 2007; Schmallegger & Carson, 2008) and can be viewed as more trustworthy than official tourism websites (Fotis et al., 2012), whereas other studies have shown that sources such as DMO websites are, conversely, more trustworthy than social media sites (Cox et al., 2009; Munar & Jacobsen, 2013). Despite being arguably independent of tourism businesses and organizations (Litvin et al., 2008) and useful to some participants in the study, eWOM was less useful than other information sources such as a BBC documentary and the Lonely Planet (autonomous information sources) for other participants. This parallels previous acknowledgement that eWOM on social media is secondary/complementary to the travel planning process (Papathanassis & Knolle, 2011; Sotiriadis & van Zyl, 2013). In addition, WOM was not only a valuable resource for the participants when planning their trip, but also at times superseded eWOM when making travel

decisions. These outcomes lead to our next topic of discussion: the role of other information sources in influencing image/expectations.

Information Sources Other Than Social Media Can Contribute to Image/Expectations

Although the focus of this research is on the influence of social media on visitor satisfaction, it cannot be ignored that all the participants used information sources other than social media when dreaming about visiting Churchill someday and/or when planning their trip. Despite viewing social media content before visiting Churchill, participants in the study found other sources useful when gathering information about Churchill, in particular traditional WOM from friends and family. WOM appeared to be influential in informing decisions regarding, for instance, which tour operators to book for excursions and the types of excursions to participate in while visiting Churchill. Some of the participants not only found WOM useful, but relied on it over eWOM when making travel decisions. For instance, there were participants who viewed eWOM on social media regarding accommodations before visiting Churchill, but ultimately relied on WOM when choosing which accommodations to stay at during their trip. Given this preference for WOM over eWOM by the participants, it is possible that WOM could have had a greater influence on destination image/trip expectations and subsequent satisfaction than eWOM (or other forms of UGC) from social media. The role of WOM as a significant resource for travelers planning their trip has been acknowledged previously (Litvin et al., 2008).

While research has indicated that eWOM is influential in the travel planning process (Litvin et al., 2008; Sotiriadis & van Zyl, 2013), as well as identified the conditions in which eWOM/UGC is favourable in influencing travel decisions (Papathanassis & Knolle, 2011; Sotiriadis & van Zyl, 2013), the inclination towards traditional WOM by participants would suggest that it may be viewed as being more reliable, credible, and trustworthy than eWOM/

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UGC from social media. This, in addition to the skepticism conveyed towards eWOM and other forms of UGC by participants in the study, indicates that future research into this area would be beneficial. If it is true that WOM is more favourable than eWOM/UGC for travelers planning their trip, tourism management professionals/organizations that rely on positive eWOM to promote their destinations would need to, among other things, continue to ensure satisfaction among their visitors. If a destination's visitors are satisfied with their trip, the recommendations they provide to friends and family could be more influential in the travel planning process than eWOM/UGC from social media. Given the unequal treatment of WOM and eWOM found in the study, despite both being inherently organic in nature, this further emphasizes the need for a re-evaluation of organic and induced information sources in the Web 2.0 era.

In addition to the role of WOM when trip planning, there were some participants who appeared to have an image of Churchill based on information sources other than social media before visiting the destination, which could have contributed to trip expectations and visitor satisfaction. Some of the participants, after describing their image of Churchill before their trip as being, "isolated", "limited", "plain," "inhospitable", "baron", "cold", and "lots of bugs", indicated that their image of the destination originated from elsewhere, including from past experience living in the region, WOM, and other sources. It would seem, then, that viewing social media content before visiting Churchill had little, if any, influence on destination image for some participants in the study. This outcome not only further suggests that social media is secondary/complementary to the travel planning process (Papathanassis & Knolle, 2011; Sotiriadis & van Zyl, 2013), but it also reinforces the need to further investigate the reliability, credibility, and trustworthiness of eWOM/UGC on social media versus additional information sources. While previous research has compared eWOM/UGC to tourism businesses and

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organizations (Fotis et al., 2012; Gretzel et al., 2007; Schmallegger & Carson, 2008), some participants in the study appeared to use other information sources such as WOM to construct their image of Churchill before their trip. Therefore, an investigation of reliability, credibility, and trustworthiness between eWOM/UGC and information sources other than tourism businesses and organizations, such as WOM, would be beneficial.

Participants in the study were also familiar with Churchill as being a wildlife destination before visiting. This prior knowledge may have influenced their image/expectations of the destination and subsequent visitor satisfaction. Participants generally recognized that Churchill was renowned for its mega fauna including polar bears and beluga whales, the Aurora borealis (northern lights), and wilderness activities including dog sledding/carting and bird watching. While it appeared that eWOM and other forms of UGC primarily provided new information about the destination, such as additional activities to do while visiting and information regarding amenities available in the area, the content also did seem to contribute to participants' image of Churchill, namely their affective image (i.e., emotional evaluations) rather than their cognitive image. As participants were familiar with Churchill before visiting, this outcome aligns with previous research which has found that familiarity with the destination is associated with affective evaluations of image and lack of familiarity is associated with cognitive evaluations (MacKay & Fesenmaier, 1997). Based on participants' responses during their interviews, there are indications that social media content influenced emotional evaluations made towards wildlife experiences. The participants made remarks regarding the content they viewed on social media such as "I felt so safe" (knowing there would be zodiacs on excursions based on reading TripAdvisor reviews), "This is so cool!" (referring to wildlife viewed on a Facebook video), and "I was pretty excited" (from watching wildlife footage on YouTube), which would suggest that it

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helped contribute to their affective image of Churchill. Perhaps if Churchill was a new and unfamiliar destination to the participants, social media would have greater contributed to cognitive image. Therefore, it would be worth examining other destinations in the future, preferably those that are less known to participants in the study, to confirm if familiarity with the destination dictates the way in which social media influences cognitive and affective image.

How Does Social Media Influence Visitor Satisfaction?

Based on the findings from this research, ascertaining how social media content influences visitor satisfaction appears to be somewhat challenging. Among other things, participants were skeptical of eWOM and other forms of UGC, and they favoured other information sources such as WOM when planning their trip. As such, it would seem unlikely that social media had a significant influence on image/expectations, and therefore would have had a limited influence on satisfaction. However, there are some indications which suggest that viewing social media content before visiting a place can contribute to visitor satisfaction.

Although the participants in the study were familiar with Churchill as a wildlife destination before their trip, viewing social media content regarding wildlife experiences appeared to help influence their affective image of Churchill, as they expressed emotional evaluations towards the content. This occurred regardless of whether the content was user generated or from a tourism organization. In addition, social media content depicting wildlife in Churchill also influenced trip expectations. For instance, it seemed to positively influence participants' expectations with respect to the quality of interactions they would have with wildlife in the area. Finally, wildlife was a prominent component of visitor satisfaction. When describing their satisfaction, participants largely spoke to their experiences with wildlife in Churchill, which would suggest

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that this was a significant contributor. Therefore, based on these findings, social media content can contribute to image and influence expectations, which may then contribute to satisfaction.

While social media content of wildlife may have influenced participants' satisfaction in this research, the same does not appear to be true with respect to social media content depicting other components of Churchill, such as accommodations. Although participants viewed content on, among other things, the Itsanitaq (Eskimo) Museum, the Visitor Information Centre/train station, accommodations, amenities, transportation, and food and beverage, these components did not appear to contribute significantly towards visitor satisfaction, as they were not prominently mentioned by participants when describing their satisfaction during their interviews. There are some reasons which may explain why this occurred; it is possible that these components of Churchill did contribute to satisfaction, but the participants simply did not mention them during their interviews. Despite the influence of social media content depicting wildlife on affective image and expectations, content regarding other components of Churchill also may have not significantly contributed to image/expectations and therefore may have not influenced satisfaction, which is a possibility given the skepticism towards eWOM and other forms of UGC conveyed by the participants and given their preference for other types of information sources such as WOM. However, there were some indications that social media influenced image/expectations regardless of the attributes of Churchill depicted in the content. For example, TripAdvisor reviews seemed to positively influence one participant's expectations towards the Itsanitaq (Eskimo) Museum and influenced another participant's decision regarding restaurants they would visit while staying in Churchill (arguably based on the expectations they developed from viewing the content beforehand).

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If social media, then, influenced participants' image/expectations regarding wildlife as well as other components of Churchill, but participants primarily attributed their satisfaction with Churchill based on their wildlife experiences, perhaps this is because the quality of wildlife experiences was viewed as being one of the most significant variables to achieving satisfaction by the participants. In other words, it is possible that other components of Churchill such as accommodations and food and beverage performed well during the trip, or did not perform well for that matter, but the quality of their performance was not important to the participants and therefore did not significantly contribute to satisfaction. Based on the satisfaction expressed by participants in the study, there is some evidence to support this explanation. For instance, of the participants who viewed social media content regarding food and beverage in Churchill before their trip (four participants), none of them explicitly indicated that their satisfaction was influenced by their food and beverage experiences while visiting. Moreover, almost half of the participants (seven participants) viewed social media content of accommodations before visiting Churchill, but none identified accommodations as a significant contributor to satisfaction. It is possible, then, that accommodations and food and beverage in Churchill either did not perform well during the trip, but were not important for participants in achieving satisfaction, or they did perform well but were still not important when participants were determining their satisfaction states. Variability in components of a destination that determine visitor satisfaction has been found in previous tourism studies (Chu & Choi, 2000; Wade & Eagles, 2003). Service quality, room and front desk, security, and value were found to be important attributes of accommodations for both business and leisure travelers visiting Hong Kong, whereas business facilities and food and recreation were a low priority (Chu & Choi, 2000). Differences were also found for visitors in Kilimanjaro and Serengeti National Parks respectively in Tanzania.

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According to Wade and Eagles (2003), low levels of litter, security from theft, knowledge of guides, friendliness of guides, group harmony, low levels of crowdedness, cleanliness of washrooms, friendliness of staff, and accommodations were important whereas friendliness of porters, convenience of registration, security from wildlife attacks, and availability of information were not important contributors to satisfaction for visitors to Kilimanjaro National Park. For visitors to Serengeti National Park, knowledge of guides, friendliness of guides, security from theft, low level of crowdedness, and group harmony were important whereas cleanliness of washrooms, security from wildlife attacks, friendless of staff, accommodations, availability of information, visitor centres, and quality of roads were not important determinants of satisfaction (Wade & Eagles, 2003).

Given the findings from the current study, then, it is possible that del Bosque and San Martín's (2008) cognitive-affective model of tourist satisfaction may not be the best model in explaining satisfaction among participants in this study. Rather, Martilla and James' (1977) IPA model may better explain satisfaction. Under the IPA model, social media contributes to satisfaction when social media content projects components of a destination that travelers perceive as being important in achieving satisfaction (such as wildlife in Churchill for participants in this study), and satisfaction is determined based on how well these components performed when visiting the destination. The influence of social media on satisfaction varies among travelers depending on the attributes viewed on social media before traveling to a destination and the importance placed on those attributes when determining satisfaction states. As this study is qualitative in nature, further research is needed to verify that IPA would be the best fit for explaining satisfaction under these circumstances, and using quantitative research

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methods as has been done previously (Chu & Choi, 2000; Wade & Eagles, 2003) to determine the generalizability of this assessment would prove beneficial.

Chapter VI: Conclusion

This research investigated how viewing trip-related social media content during the pre-trip phase of travel influences visitor satisfaction. Churchill, a renowned tourism destination in Manitoba, Canada, was the site used for exploration. Previous studies have emphasized the role of social media during the travel process, as well as the influence of social media during the pre-trip phase of travel on loyalty and making travel decisions. The present study focused on the influence of social media on the post-trip phase of travel, namely on satisfaction, using del Bosque and San Martín's cognitive-affective model of tourist satisfaction (2008) as the theoretical framework. This is an area not only limited in investigation within the social media and tourism literature, but also has important implications for tourism planning and management professionals and organizations in informing future decisions and strategies. Satisfaction will ultimately influence loyalty towards a destination, whether that is by influencing the decision to visit the destination again and/or recommending it to others.

Using a qualitative approach in the form of participant interviews, the findings suggest that social media can influence visitor satisfaction when travelers view it before visiting a destination. For participants in the study, social media helped influence destination image – namely affective image as participants were familiar with Churchill as being a wildlife destination before visiting – as well as influenced expectations of anticipated experiences. However, as participants viewed social media content of Churchill on a variety of its attributes before their trip, they appeared to primarily articulate their satisfaction with the destination based on their experiences with wildlife. This suggests that social media may only influence satisfaction when travelers view content that depicts a component of the destination that is important to them in achieving satisfaction. Satisfaction would then be determined based on

how well the component performed during the trip. If this is the case, this may mean that del Bosque and San Martín's (2008) cognitive-affective model of tourist satisfaction may not be the best model for explaining satisfaction in this research. Rather, Martilla & James' (1977) IPA model may better explain satisfaction, where satisfaction is based on the components of a destination that are important to a traveler and how well the components perform during a trip.

There was also evidence to suggest that the participants in the study were skeptical of investing in the narrative of social media content, including eWOM and other forms of UGC, when trip planning. In addition, despite the proliferation of eWOM/UGC in recent years, traditional WOM still appeared to be a useful resource for participants when planning their trips, at times superseding eWOM/UGC. This, in conjunction with the fact that travelers typically use additional information sources when trip planning (as was found in this research), reaffirms that social media is secondary/complementary to the travel planning process as has been acknowledged in the previous literature. Therefore, image and expectations of a destination are likely shaped by a variety of sources other than social media when travelers are dreaming about a destination or planning a trip, of which could also contribute to satisfaction.

Theoretical Development

The findings in this research inadvertently suggest that a re-evaluation of the categorization of information sources, namely organic versus induced, is worth considering. Social media content positively influenced expectations of whale watching excursions for participants, regardless of whether the content was organic or induced. Also, participants conveyed skepticism towards eWOM and other forms of UGC (organic information source) when viewing it before their trip, yet induced information sources (such as a DMO) have been traditionally known to have lower credibility since they generally project the most salient

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attributes of a destination. Moreover, traditional WOM appeared to be more reliable, creditable, and trustworthy than eWOM by participants in the study, despite both being arguably organic in nature. The findings here appear to run counter to the existing narrative that organic information sources are more credible than induced information sources. As the classification of organic and induced information sources took place during the pre-Web 2.0 era, (Fakeye & Crompton, 1991; Gartner, 1994), an update to the current definitional framework that includes eWOM and other forms of UGC would prove beneficial.

Although there was lack of evidence to support del Bosque and San Martín's (2008) cognitive-affective model of tourist satisfaction, the findings from the study also demonstrated that Martilla and James' (1977) IPA model may instead be the more useful model to explain satisfaction. Participants viewed social media content on different attributes of Churchill when planning their trip and, although they interacted with a variety of components of the destination while visiting (e.g., accommodations, food and beverage, etc.), the participants primarily spoke of their wildlife experiences as a main contributor to their satisfaction. This could suggest that satisfaction is based on an evaluation of the performance of a destination's attributes, but only of those attributes that a traveler deems important in achieving satisfaction. In the case of this study, wildlife in Churchill appeared to be an important component of the destination to influence visitor satisfaction, whereas other components of Churchill such as accommodations and food and beverage did not appear to significantly contribute to satisfaction, regardless of how they performed during the trip.

Limitations

While this research offers insight into the influence of social media on visitor satisfaction, there are limitations to this study that suggest additional exploration is needed to further support

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the findings. This research project, like other tourism-related studies, focuses on one destination area. Participants were familiar with Churchill as a being a wildlife destination before using social media to plan their trip, and it is possible that social media could have contributed to image/expectations differently if the destination was less familiar to participants. Future research should investigate other destinations, preferably those that participants are less familiar with before viewing social media in the pre-trip phase of travel, to help strengthen the findings from this study. In addition, interview data was collected during one two-week period using a “one shot” approach, making it difficult to determine if data saturation was reached before beginning analysis. In anticipation of this possibility, a decision was made prior to data collection to conduct 20 interviews, more than believed was necessary, to better create the conditions for data saturation to be achieved. This number of interviews would compensate in the event that they varied in quality and that some would potentially be omitted from analysis, as was the case in this research. While using a “one shot” approach is not uncommon in tourism-related studies, such as during festivals or special events which generally take place over a limited period of time, it may have been of benefit to repeat data collection in Churchill, doing so during a different time period, to further strengthen the findings from this research.

Additional limitations from this study include those generally found when conducting qualitative research and using interviews as the study’s research method. While interviews allow for the collection of rich, textual data from the perspective of study participants, the findings are not generalizable and the interpretation of the data are ultimately that on the part of the researcher. It is possible that personal biases can influence the interpretation of interview transcripts during data analysis, and that what participants say mean something different from what the researcher interprets. While the possibility of having personal bias interfere with data

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analysis was known beforehand, and any subsequent bias that did occur during data analysis was unintentional, the findings could be further strengthened if future research used quantitative methods where researcher bias is less likely to occur. The use of such methods would also help generalize the findings from the study.

Future Research

The findings from this study showed better support for Martilla and James' (1977) IPA model of satisfaction, where satisfaction is based on an assessment of performance of a destination's attributes which are deemed important by the traveler, than del Bosque and San Martín's (2008) cognitive-affective model of tourist satisfaction. Despite viewing social media content on a variety of attributes of Churchill, participants primarily identified their experiences with wildlife as the main contributor to their satisfaction. This suggests if social media influenced satisfaction, it has done so only for those participants who viewed content of wildlife experiences before their trip, and the content influenced their expectations. As the IPA model is generally applied in quantitative studies (e.g., Chu & Choi, 2000; Wade & Eagles, 2003), the integrity of the model still requires further investigation. The relationship between expectations developed from viewing social media content of wildlife before visiting Churchill and satisfaction are currently assumed based on the model rather than confirmed through methods found via quantitative research. Therefore, future research would prove beneficial to verify that the IPA model is the best fit to explain satisfaction.

In addition, future research should explore and compare the reliability, credibility, and trustworthiness of information sources considered organic within the current definitional framework. In this study, participants conveyed skepticism towards eWOM and other forms of UGC when viewing it before their trip, whereas they appeared to value traditional WOM from

friends and family. While previous research has found that UGC is more reliable and more credible than traditional tourist information sources (Gretzel, Yoo, & Purifoy, 2007; Schmallegger & Carson, 2008), and UGC is more trustworthy than official tourism websites (Fotis et al., 2012), there has yet to be an exploration of reliability, credibility, and trustworthiness between different types of organic information sources such as eWOM/UGC and WOM. It is possible that such an exploration has not taken place because it has not been necessary up until the Web 2.0 era. As the findings in this research suggest that there may be differences in reliability, credibility, and trustworthiness between eWOM/UGC and WOM – both organic information sources – future research in this area may be beneficial, as it could help inform tourism management professionals and their organizations as to the marketing effectiveness of these sources on their prospective visitors.

Managerial Implications

The findings from this research have practical and managerial implications for tourism management professionals and their organizations. Firstly, the main contributor to visitor satisfaction for participants in this study was wildlife experiences. Other attributes of Churchill, such as accommodations and food and beverage, did not appear to significantly contribute to satisfaction, which could suggest that these attributes of Churchill are either a low priority or they performed well but were not important to the participants in achieving satisfaction (i.e. overkill). Tourism professionals and operators for Churchill, then, should continue to offer opportunities to view wildlife in the area. Secondly, with respect to the role of social media in the pre-trip phase of travel, it helped reveal new information about Churchill, including tour opportunities, activities to do in Churchill, and attractions. While most of the participants used social media primarily for trip planning and they had already made the decision to visit, finding

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out new information about Churchill in some instances influenced travel decisions, such as the decision to visit the Itsanitaq Museum. Therefore, while social media may have been less useful in influencing the decision to visit Churchill, it could be useful in encouraging travelers to participate in additional activities during their trip, which may result in more money being left behind at the destination. Thirdly, tourism management professionals and their organizations, at least with respect to Churchill, should continue to recognize the importance of WOM among their visitors. WOM was an important resource that participants used when planning their trip and making travel decisions. While WOM is difficult to control, professionals and organizations should not only focus their efforts on marketing and promoting their destinations, but also ensuring satisfaction among their visitors in order to increase the chances of positive WOM that visitors will share with their friends and family. Lastly, the findings from this research also indicate that, despite the existence of social media, additional information sources still play an important role when trip planning. All the participants in the study used other information sources when thinking about and planning their trip to Churchill, some of whom appeared to rely significantly on these sources. While social media is important in tourism marketing, management professionals and their organizations should continue to incorporate other information sources into their marketing strategies, as these sources can also contribute to image, expectations, and subsequent satisfaction.

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Appendix A

Interview Guide

Introduction: Travel Questions

1. Where are you visiting Churchill from? (Where do you live?)
2. Where else did you travel to on this trip?
3. How long was your stay in Churchill (dates)?
4. What other destinations did you consider before deciding to visit Churchill?
5. How far ahead of time did you start planning your trip to Churchill?
6. What did you have the opportunity to see/do while you were in Churchill? (Probe for location of activities (Where did you go?) and types of activities (e.g. view wildlife/scenery, culture/way of life, visit tourism sites, participate in leisure activities, etc.))

Section I: Social Media Use Before Travel

1. In what ways did you use social media before your trip to Churchill? (Probe: When dreaming about your travel experience? Planning? Booking?)
2. What types of social media did you use to help you choose this destination? To help plan the trip once the destination was chosen? (Probe: By social media, I mean Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Pinterest, YouTube, TripAdvisor, Wikitravel, etc.)
3. How did you use these types of social media? (Probe: Viewing photos, asking friends/family/reviewers for information, researching transportation, accommodation, food/beverage, attractions, adventure tourism/outdoor recreation, etc.)

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4. Where did this social media content come from? (Probe: Did it come from tourism organizations such as a destination marketing organization (e.g. Travel Manitoba) and/or from non-tourism specific information sources such as friends/family or online reviewers?)
5. What other types of information sources did you use to help you choose this destination? To help plan the trip once the destination was chosen? (Word of mouth, images/videos from friends/family, internet, television, magazines/newspapers, informational brochures, books, radio, etc.)

Section II – Social Media and Destination Image

1. Based on viewing social media content before your trip to Churchill, how would you describe your image of the destination before you visited? (Probe: Wildlife/scenery, climate, hospitality, leisure activities, culture/way of life, availability/quality of services, safety, etc.)
2. Based on viewing social media content before your trip to Churchill, how would you describe your expectations of the destination before you visited? (Probe: What aspects of the destination contributed towards your expectations?)
3. Based on viewing social media content before your trip to Churchill, how would you describe your desire to travel to the destination before you visited? (Probe: What aspects of the destination provoked your desire to visit Churchill?)

Section III: Social Media and Visitor Satisfaction

1. Did your experience meet, exceed or fall below your expectations? (Probe: Why do you feel this way?)

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2. How would you describe the types of emotions you experienced while you were visiting Churchill? (Probe: What types of emotions did you experience? Were they positive or negative? What aspects of the destination contributed towards your emotions?)
3. Overall, how would you describe your level of satisfaction with your visit to Churchill? (Probe: Why do you feel this way? Are you happy that you decided to visit? Did you get to see/experience everything you hoped to?)

Conclusion

1. Given the opportunity, would you visit Churchill again and/or recommend it to others? (Probe: Why do you feel this way?)
2. What other comments do you have?

Thank you for your time!

Appendix B

Consent Form



UNIVERSITY
OF MANITOBA

August 2016

Research Project Title: #tourism: The Influence of Social Media on Satisfaction with Visitor Experiences in Churchill, Manitoba

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This consent form, a copy of which will be left with you for your records and reference, is only part of the process of informed consent. It should give you the basic idea of what the research is about and what your participation will involve. If you would like more detailed information about something mentioned here, or not included here, feel free to ask. Please take the time to read this carefully and to understand any accompanying information.

The purpose of this research is to examine the influence of social media on visitor satisfaction at tourist destination areas. Specifically, I am examining how satisfaction is influenced by destination image that has been shaped by social media content before a trip. The findings from this study will provide insight into better understanding travel experiences and help guide tourism marketing efforts. This study is being conducted for a master's thesis under the supervision of two thesis advisors.

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If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to partake in an interview lasting approximately 20-30 minutes in which you will be asked questions about your social media use before visiting Churchill and your travel experience now that your visit is complete. You will also be asked to review your interview transcript and provide feedback (if any), which should take approximately one hour. The interview will be audio recorded (unless you indicate that you are not willing to be recorded, then no recording will be made and detailed notes of the interview will be taken). If you are uncomfortable responding to any questions you are not required to provide a response or you can choose to respond in writing rather than verbally. The Principal Investigator (myself) will be transcribing interview data, which I will subsequently email to you within two months of your interview. You will be asked to provide any feedback that you may have regarding the transcripts via email in one week before I assume you are comfortable with the information and proceed with analysis.

Recordings and notes from the interviews will be stored on a password protected USB drive, in a locked filing cabinet at the residence of the Principal Investigator (myself). Your name and contact information will not be attached to your interview information (a pseudonym will be used to identify your information). The only people who will have access to the original interview notes, recordings, and transcriptions are the Principal Investigator and the thesis advisors (on an anonymized basis). The University of Manitoba may look at research records to see that the research is being done in a safe and proper way. Any dissemination of this study will use only your assigned pseudonym, not your real name. If you choose to stop participating in this research at any point in time, you can notify the researcher of your intent to do so and all your information related to this study (interview data and personal information) will be destroyed and you will not be contacted further to participate in the study.

Risks of participating in this study are not expected to be greater than those experienced in the normal conduct of your everyday life, however you may choose to respond in writing to any questions that you prefer not to respond to verbally. It is possible that others may hear your responses to the interview questions if the interview takes place at the Churchill Airport/Churchill train station. If you feel uncomfortable with a question, you can skip that question or withdraw from the study.

Original recordings and notes will be kept on file in a secure locked space until the completion of the study and for no more than three years, at which point it will be destroyed by deleting all electronic files and reformatting the USB drives that they were stored on. Any paper documents will be shredded at the completion of the study (in no more than three years). After I have finished data collection and have sent you a copy of the results of the study, I will destroy the list of participants' contact information and your individual responses. I anticipate that all data will be destroyed by May 2019.

Taking part in the study is voluntary; you are free to withdraw your participation from this study at any time. If you do not want to be in this study, you do not have to participate.

If you have any questions or concerns about the research conducted, please contact the Principal Investigator or one of the thesis advisors (see contact information listed above).

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This research has been approved by the Education/Nursing Research Ethics Board, University of Manitoba. If you have any concerns or complaints about this project you may contact any of the above-named persons or the Human Ethics Coordinator, Pinar Eskicioglu at (204) 474-7122 or e-mail humanethics@umanitoba.ca.

By signing below, you have indicated that you have read and understood the consent form and that you are eligible to participate in the study as an adult 18 years of age or over.

Participant Signature:

Date:

Researcher Signature:

Date:

Name:

Telephone Number:

Email Address:

Participant # _____

Are you interested in receiving a summary of the results once this study is complete?

Yes No

If yes, please complete the information below:

Name:

Email Address:

or

Mailing Address: