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Virtual Community Based Destination Marketing with YouTube

Investigation of a Typology

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ABSTRACT

YouTube has now evolved into a powerful medium for social interaction. Utilizing YouTube for enhancing marketing endeavours is a strategy practiced by marketing professionals across several industries. This paper rationalizes on the different strategies of leveraging YouTube-based platforms for effective destination marketing by the hospitality industry (hotels) and provides insights on the critical drivers and challenges embedded within YouTube-based community interactions for destination marketing. The comments made by YouTube users have been subjected to a content analysis and the results are reported under the five broad clusters of virtual communities. More broadly, the typology of virtual communities is adapted to evaluate the YouTube platform for effective destination marketing.

Keywords Destination Marketing, Interaction Design, Tourism, Virtual Communities, YouTube

1. INTRODUCTION

Social media is increasingly being seen as a success factor in tourism promotion. Social media is changing the ways in which businesses are marketing themselves to their consumers, as it forces a rethink of traditional marketing methods. A recent study claims that social media and new technology will play a key role in the growth of the hospitality industry in 2015 (Roseman & Stuhura, 2013); and in the world's largest social media market, China, where brands and activities differ significantly from those in other parts of the globe, social networking is still more popular. For example, Kemp (2014) identifies QZone as having the highest number of active social networking users at 625 million, while Weixin and Sina have 355 million and 129 million active users respectively.

For decades, the computer-mediated information exchange has been an area of growing research interest. This includes the study of a variety of virtual platforms and the use of those platforms in key e-Business applications such as e-marketing, e-learning and e-health. Marketers are challenged to keep pace with the latest development of online social networks (OSNs) such as MySpace (MS), YouTube (YT) and Facebook (FB) due to the rapid growth of information exchange among consumers on the internet facilitated through OSNs (Valck et al., 2009). Although empirical work has illustrated the uneven quality of the research undertaken into virtual communities (Leimeister et al., 2004), there is evidence that virtual communities are among the most powerful tools available for customer bonding (Szmigin et al., 2004; Tsai & Bagozzi, 2014).

A number of studies have focused on the usability, accessibility and e-commerce success aspects of tourism websites in developing countries (Sambhanthan and Good, 2012; 2013; 2014). Among the many studies investigating use of the internet in tourism promotion, one recent study unveiled a very high level of computer and internet usage in tourism-related user-based information search (Jacobsen & Munar, 2012). This study also noted that 75% of respondents had a FB profile, adding confirmation of the trend towards continuing growth in OSNs for destination marketing.

YouTube (YT), a premier social media platform, has more than 800 million users each month (YouTube, 2013). Other research into YT has highlighted the potential of this channel for tourism-related marketing (Rotman & Preece, 2010), though this is still an emerging area. One relatively recent paper reports that YT videos have the potential to substantially improve the experience of tourists through elevating tourism-related information and experiences (Tussyadiah & Fesenmaier, 2009). This study notes that these videos generate mental pleasure through firing people's imaginations, as well as imparting the feeling of travelling again to destinations tourists have already visited in the past. Such findings illustrate the importance of further research into the use of the YT platform for destination marketing. Selecting YT as a medium to market tourist destinations however remains an open question for exploration in the context of rapidly emerging marketing models using the web 2.0. The present research project thus focuses on the following question:

- How can hotels make use of YouTube-based Virtual Communities for Destination Marketing?

The usage of YT for destination marketing has been a well-researched area. A study reported by Reino and Hay (2011) reports that the YT was useful as a promotional/ communications tool, but more research is required to understand how the YT generation filter, select and use tourism information in their trip planning. On the other hand, Hays et al., (2012) argues that the use of social media usage among the top destination marketing organisations is still largely experimental and the strategies vary significantly. Arguably, Bonifaciao (2015) confirms that the Facebook, YouTube and Twitter are ranked as most effective marketing channels in today's world. Another recent study reported by Riera et al., (2015) indicates that the users who publish tourist information online value the web platforms which provide user generated content for supporting decision making that could include platforms like YT. Hudson et al., (2015) reports that the social media based relationships also lead to positive word of mouth recommendations. All these studies show the emerging trend in social media based tourism promotion in different ways. Thus, the research question posed above has been argued to be making a timely contribution to the existing body of knowledge in this space.

This research question has been addressed by means of a qualitative study. The investigation presented here uses a typology-based approach to assess the interaction effectiveness of YT-based virtual communities. In addition, the study focuses on developing a set of implications for utilising YT-based community interactions as a means for destination marketing. The research question has therefore been operationalised into four specific objectives as follows:

- To investigate YT-based virtual communities
- To investigate the user perceptions on human interaction with virtual communities
- To develop a set of implications for virtual community-based destination marketing

In this paper, we organise our thoughts as follows: firstly, a literature review is conducted into YT-based virtual communities. Following this theoretical understanding user perception of – and their interactions with – YT-based virtual communities is evaluated by scanning YouTube comments

made by users. Finally, a set of implications for utilising YT-based virtual communities for destination marketing will be highlighted, followed by a discussion of limitations and future research directions.

2. VIRTUAL COMMUNITIES

Virtual communities can be defined differently according to their context. Romm et al. (1997) defined virtual communities as "the groups of people who communicate with each other via electronic media" (p. 261). While this definition allows for a very wide-ranging scope for virtual community formation, the scope of the current research effort has been restricted to those virtual communities based on the YT-platform, where the context is focused on destination marketing. In this context, the term virtual community (VC) is therefore redefined as "the groups of people" who communicate tourism-related destination information and experiences with one another via YouTube. Arguably, Lee et al., (2003) have shown that the existence of cyberspace is a common unique characteristic of any definitions of virtual community existing in the literature. According to Howard (1993) three major factors that describe a virtual community are 1) Net / cyberspace; 2) public discussion; 3) personal relationship. In fact, these three factors are considered to be the distinguishing factors of a virtual community from any other forms of community exist.

2.1. Typology of Virtual Communities

Virtual community research has progressed well in the recent past unlike ever before. There has been a number of studies applying the typological thinking to the virtual community literature. For example, Dube et al., (2006) investigated a typology of virtual communities of practice incorporating twenty-one typological characteristics. The typologies' structuring characteristics are then classified into two broad themes namely demographics and organisational context which include a number of sub categories such as orientation, life span, age, level of maturity, creation process boundary crossing, environment, organisational slack, degree of institutional formalism, leadership and size. However, this categorisation does not reflect any characteristics which are related to the marketing function of the organisations concerned. On the other hand, Vlack et al., (2009) documented a research which looks at virtual communities from a marketing perspective. The research looks at the problem of community involvement and interaction in the customer decision process with the intervening effect of virtual communities in that process as the overarching mechanism. However, this research lacks to address the problem of laying out a typological expression to solve the issues pertaining to the marketing related problems occurring in the virtual communities. Burnett (2000) investigated a typology to assess the information exchange in virtual communities which is based on the human information behaviour models. The typology is based on two broad types of information behaviour expressed by users of the virtual community platforms namely hostile interactive behaviour and collaborative or positive interactive behaviour. The hostile interactive behaviour has sub categorisations namely flaming, trolling, spamming, cyber-rape while the collaborative interactive behaviours are ranging from behaviour not specifically oriented towards information, neutral behaviours such as pleasantries and gossip, humorous behaviours such as language games and other types of play, empathetic behaviours such as emotional support and specific information oriented behaviours. However, this typology has been overly focused on the behavioural side of virtual communities than of the business side, which is a contextual requirement in this research which aims to model the YouTube virtual communities for destination marketing. On the contrary, Porter (2006) introduces a new typology for modelling the virtual communities which comprises five typological elements such as purpose, place, platform, population and profit model. This typology provides a multidisciplinary background to the investigation of virtual community typologies with application possibility to a number of industries and contexts. For instance, Messinger et al., (2008) applied the above typology to interpret the developments of virtual worlds which then evolves into a number of industries of focus for interpreting the results. Besides the applicability to multiple domains, the typology propounded by Porter (2006) has been

identified as a strong construct for modelling any sorts of issues pertaining to the virtual communities due to its multidisciplinary focus. In addition to this, the Porter (2006) typology provides a more holistic view of almost all aspects of the virtual communities which could be modelled in a virtual community based problem domain. Therefore, the conceptual framework for this research has been based on the typology of virtual community propounded by Porter (2006).

2.2. Conceptual Framework

The VC typology outlines five major themes under which these communities could be studied. These five main themes are derived from the 5Ps of virtual communities. Messinger, et al. discussed the VC typology, and the historical developments of research in Social Virtual Worlds (Messinger et al., 2008). The authors clearly outlined the development of the gaming industry as well as the social networking industry while explaining the five (5) Ps of a VC typology as propounded by prior research: Purpose, Place, Platform, Population, and Profit Model. Additionally, the Messinger et al. (2008) paper uses the typology to interpret the historical progression of innovations in the electronic gaming and social networking industries. The authors argued that the typology could assist in identifying the future applications for business, e-commerce and education, as well as potentially new technological features and research topics in social, management and computing sciences. Still, the above claim is likely to be accepted only in specific cases. Especially, the typology has been originally proposed for VC classification. The elements of the typology indicate aspects such as population, which is very much contextual to virtual communities. However, the other aspects such as purpose, place, platform, and profit model could be applicable to almost all other domains. Therefore, the above claim could be accepted under the grounds that the claim is made based on a generalization of aspects that could be applied to domains other than virtual communities. However, the applicable domain needs to be scientifically tested in order to derive any meaningful conclusions on the above. This research, having been applied to the use of YT-based virtual communities for destination marketing, aims to test the above claim for its business related application. For example, this research aims to look at the applicability of the five typological elements in furthering the practice of destination marketing. Whilst the overall purpose of this research is targeted on devising a set of implications for YouTube based destination marketing, the application of typological thinking to the business related applications is paramount. The Porter (2006) typology, which is adapted in guiding the thinking of this research, is outlined below:

The conceptual framework for this research project is based on the typology of virtual community propounded by Porter (2006), whose VC typology outlines five major themes, derived from the 5Ps of virtual communities namely - Purpose, Place, Platform, Population and Profit Model (Porter, 2006) within which such communities could be studied. The Porter (2006) typology, which has been adapted in guiding the thinking of this research, is outlined in Table 1:

The present research project, having been applied to the use of YT-based virtual communities for destination marketing, aims to test the applicability of these five typological elements in furthering the practice of destination marketing. While the overall aim of the project is to devise a set of implications for YouTube-based destination marketing, we are particularly focused on the application of typological thinking to business-related uses. The research model devised for this research depicted in Figure 1 largely focuses on these 5Ps with sub themes emerging for more close investigation of the community based interactions.

Figure 1 outlines the five main elements of the VC typology. Firstly, the 'purpose' of interaction has three elements: content focus, content effectiveness and content accuracy. Secondly, the 'place' of interaction branches into: geographic diversity and trusting behavior. Thirdly, the 'platform' of interaction relays how the communication medium is designed. Fourthly, the 'population' is divided into: size of the population and social ties. The final element in this typology, the 'profit model', which is contextually specific for the YT-platform, stands alone.

Table 1. Purpose, place, platform, population and profit model (Porter, 2006)

Typological Element	Description
Purpose	Focuses on the specific type of information or content being communicated via the VC. Content delivery specific to a case could be strategic, managerial or tactical in nature. In this research, the term is used to denote the focus, effectiveness and accuracy of the content being presented through YT-based discussions.
Place	Focuses on whether the location is completely, or only partially, virtual. The nature of place would depend on whether the participants are co-located or geographically dispersed. The geographic locations of the YT users and the trusting behaviour among the users fall under this theme. When designated as the "trusting" behaviour, it is a form of psychological nearness among users. Therefore, 'place' will be used to connote both physical and/or psychological locations of YT users.
Platform	Refers to the type and nature of communication involved during the interaction. For example, if it is synchronous, asynchronous, or both. The term will be designated to evaluate the design of communication medium utilized for YT-based interaction among users. It also determines the effectiveness of communication medium among the users.
Population	Focuses on the size of the participating group. Social ties have less connectivity with e-commercialization. Thus distinguishing the market characteristics of the target user is critical here. Arguably, Porter (2006) also considered the types of social ties. Hence, we are concerned here with evaluating the size of the population and the social ties among the user groups. It also focuses on the psychological attachment of users, which could be utilized as a means for destination marketing.
Profit Model	Profit Model focuses on revenues or non-revenue generating environments. Here, a taxonomy of the profit model can range from: (1) a fixed-fee model like a single purchase price or registration fee; (2) a variable-fee model such as a fee per use; (3) a subscription-based model (and on what basis subscriptions are being made); (4) an advertising-based model; (5) a pay-as-you-go model (e.g., payable extras for virtual assets including clothing, land, and software); and (6) an ancillary sale model such as the sale of products like real stuffed animals and accessories, which are accompanied by passwords for accounts in Virtual Worlds. In these instances the virtual versions of the products enable the combined use of virtual as well as real world play. However, Virtual Worlds is beyond the scope of this study. The aim here is to evaluate the proposed profit model, which could be adapted by destination marketers for exchange of ideas, products and experiences related to tourism.

The content focus has been added in as sub construct of purpose. Content focus in this context could mean the topics discussed in the user generated content in the YT platform which could potentially influence the direction to which the discussion heading towards. For instance, Eysenbach et al., (2004) uses content focus as major inclusion criteria when investigating about health related virtual communities and electronic support groups. Arguably, content focus is a critical factor for the determination of efforts pertaining to the organizations in terms of leveraging the advantageous aspects of virtual communities for enhanced promotional activities (i.e. marketing promotion, health promotion) which is powered through the user generated content. On the other hand, there should be adherence to a number of legal aspects which the content providers need to take into consideration when they drive / direct the end user in a discussion which is not in compliance with the legislative guidelines in terms of obtaining informed consent from the consumer on the charges involved as well as periodic notification of charges from time to time in compliance with the standard practices which governs content delivery businesses. If there is a conflict occurs between the provider and the consumer in terms of content delivery, the consideration always goes to the side of the consumer as the golden rule of commercial law does not permit the consumer to be dealt with unfairness and injustice in the grounds of solid unambiguity or misguidance arises from the provider's end. Content effectiveness is considered to be the second construct which contribute towards determining the purpose of interaction in a virtual community. The effectiveness in which the content is presented has

Figure 1. Research Model
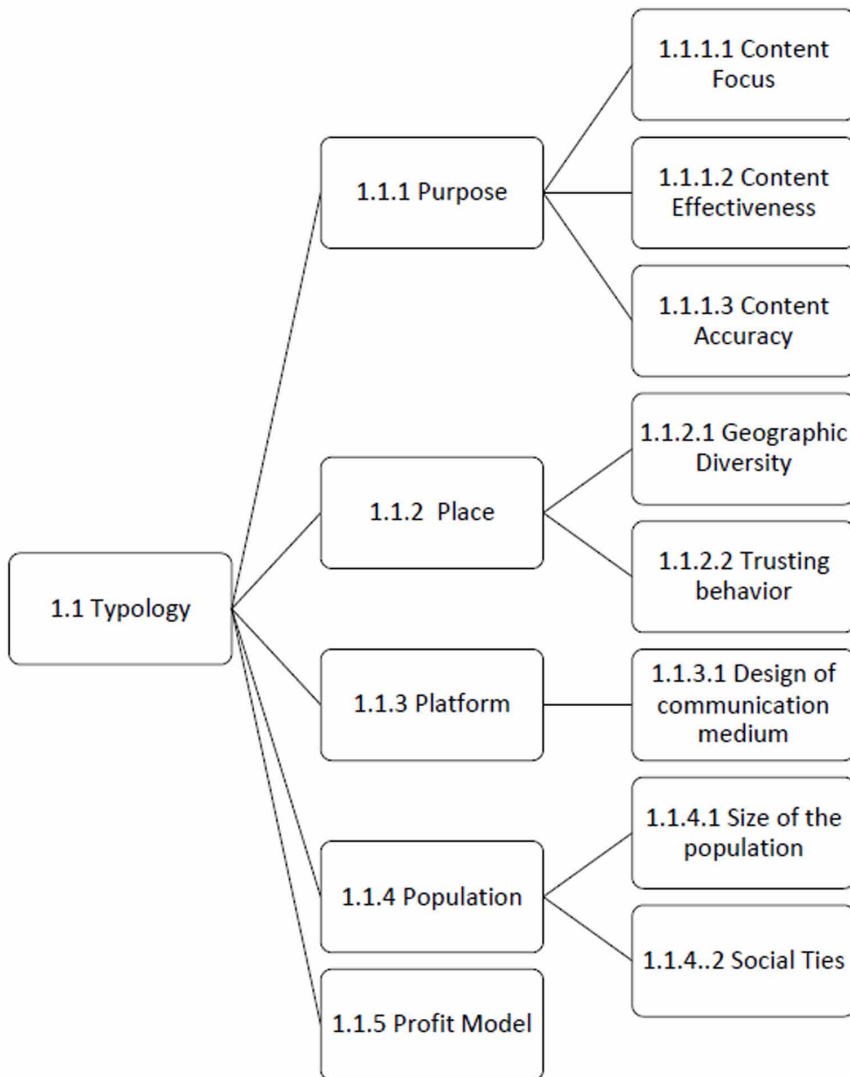
a potential impact on achieving the purpose of any virtual community. The required information has to be presented clearly and precisely to ensure a border level of audience has access to it at the first interaction. Content Accuracy is the next critical concern in supporting consumer decision making. For example, inaccurate content could lead the consumer towards confusion and unambiguity. Burnett & Buerkle (2006) asserts the increasing research concern regarding the accuracy and helpfulness / effectiveness of the health related online information sources. The authors are further discussing about the ways in which the consumers could misuse these forums to deliberately misrepresent information to mislead other members.

Geographic diversity is a main construct which has been used to model the typological element concerning the place of interaction.. The geographic diversity of the audience has to be concerned when presenting concern for YouTube based marketing activities. Arguably, Adams (2010) highlights the concept of 'virtual place' which connects people from differing geographic locations in one place through network topologies that could have potential communication effects amongst the participants. Trusting behavior is the next construct which makes the difference in virtual community based marketing effects. In fact, the trusting behavior of consumers could have critical impacts on the marketing effects through YouTube platform. In addition to this the design of proper communication medium has been selected as the sole construct for measuring the platform at large. The trust inducing design which has a number of key elements built in has a major role to play in deciding the effectiveness of the platform design. Evidently, Wang & Emurian (2005) reported the impact of trust building in electronic platforms to ensure better business activities.

The size and social characteristics of the target population are the next constructs which needs to be considered when deciding the VC content presentation. An audience analysis and related assessment of the size and the social characteristics such as the interaction effectiveness and social bonds created within the audience has a major role to play in deciding the population's effect on marketing activities. Fernbeck & Thompson (1995) argues that a significant part of a population begins to form social relationships on computer networks. This is applicable to any VC platform which would have a larger population of users who are coming from differing backgrounds and categories.

Finally, there are no specific criteria to measure the profit model since the profit model for YouTube is based on subscriptions. In addition to this the essentiality of profit model in YouTube is not an urgent concern according to documented research. Arguably, a research reported by Snelson et al., (2012) rated the marketing related concerns such as the understanding of user groups in YouTube, the motivational elements which make users to view videos, the factors which make the shared video viral as the top (first ranked) research priorities, while rating the profit earning aspect through YouTube as the last (seventh) priority. Hence, the profit model typology has been ignored in this research considering the insignificance of it towards leveraging the marketing efforts of hoteliers.

3. METHODOLOGY

While the typological approach to investigating the virtual communities has been quite widely used in previous studies on the topic, virtual community researchers have made use of a range of methodologies to elicit research data from electronic platforms such as commercial websites, social media platforms and SNSs. There are a number of indicative methods used by virtual community researchers including focus group (Gretzel et al., 2010); survey (Laroache et al., 2012) and content analysis (Smith et al., 2012). A detailed analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of each of these methods is depicted in the Appendix A. The following paragraph will discuss the data collection methods in detail to base our decision for methodology selection.

The experimental objective of this research is focused on gathering user perceptions from selected YouTube based virtual community platforms. The study applies a qualitative netnographic approach coupled with a content analysis method for data collection. Netnography is a qualitative research method developed for investigating populations online. Netnography is in other words, the type of method which embarks on ethnographic research in the internet. The method uses a natural observation or content analysis as the data collection method to evaluate consumer behaviour online. The platforms which could be evaluated using netnographic research include forums, blogs and online social media platforms.

Compared to focus groups and personal interviews, Netnography is less obtrusive conducted based on the observation of consumer behaviour online with less interference by the researcher to the interaction consumers have amongst themselves. Besides, this method could help the researcher to gather information with fewer expenses on a timely manner, which is far more critical in the context of

this research. Netnography allows continuing access to the same platform through which the researcher could have an updated grasp of the consumer behaviour and motives online (Kozinets, 2002). Thus, Netnography has been determined as the suitable research approach for this study considering the aforementioned contextual advantages.

The main weakness identified with Netnographic research is its narrow focus, the need of researcher's interpretive skills and the lack of information identifiers present in the online context that leads to difficulty generalizing results to groups outside the online community sample. However, these limitations were not found to be making an impact on this study as this research does not aim to generalize the findings to an offline context. The following paragraph discusses the data collection method and procedure adapted for this research.

A structured content analysis has been adapted for collecting primary data in this research. There are a number of studies which employ content analysis for data collection in the virtual community research as summarised in the Appendix A. However, most of these authors are using unstructured content analysis in their data collection as opposed what we do here. The main reason for this deviation relies on the nature of this research project which is using the VC typology as the yardstick for evaluating and benchmarking the YT platform in terms of destination marketing endeavours. Structured content analysis is suitable to trace data on specific criteria which needs to be analysed in depth, which is a contextual requirement of this research. It also can help to reduce the perceptual errors of respondents. The ability to obtain highly scientific results is the main strength of a structured content analysis. In fact, a structured content analysis could be used to scrutinize the actual habits which could not be traced through any other methods. Other methods could not facilitate reliable data due to the human perceptual errors involved in the data collection. Hence, a structured content analysis has been selected as the data collection method for this research.

The researcher directly took part in the investigation. A search on Sri Lankan Tourism has been conducted in the YouTube search window. The study has been conducted for five selected YouTube videos which are related to tourism. The specific focus of the video has been set out to be on a tourism destination where the end users record their comments regarding the particular destinations in the YouTube platform. This enables the data to be richer in scope and stronger in facts through allowing a holistic representation of user comments. The content of the user comments were abstracted from the YouTube platform and subjected to content analysis using the conceptual framework developed as part of the literature review. Hundred and thirty seven (137) user comments from the YouTube platform were subjected to content analysis using the conceptual framework proposed in the earlier part of this paper.

The user group include novice users, frequent users, proficient and knowledgeable users as well as expert users. However, the users have not been categorized into any of the above classification as the aim of the research was to evaluate the applicability of YouTube based community interactions as a way forward for destination marketing, which does not really needs to have the category of users. In addition, there were user comments from different geographic locations. In fact, the users have been indicating about their country of residence during the YouTube discussions. However, a country wise classification of users has not been conducted considering the insignificance of the country of residence in delivering tourism experience. Arguably, the tourism experience is constant for all users regardless of the type they fall in.

4. RESULTS

The YouTube comments which were gathered from the sample videos were transcribed into a word document. The actual screenshot of the YouTube comments is presented in Figure 2 placed in Appendix B. The comments abstracted from the YouTube platform were then cleaned and edited for language clarity. A number has been assigned to each comment in order to make it easier for referencing. Table 2 depicts the relevant comments for each criterion in the content analysis checklist.

Overall the results indicate that the climate change information, replication of natural beauty and presentation of elevating music are some of the critical success factors for YouTube based destination marketing. Irrelevant discussions, inaccurate information and a considerable amount of flaming are found to be in top list of the threats posed by user discussions for destination marketers. Users' tendency to promote the destinations of their own countries, recall previous travel memories, make comparative assessment among the destinations, be loyal to the destinations which they enjoyed, plan their vacations during the discussion and seek out travel related information through the virtual community are some of the observable phenomena which could be used advantageously by marketers.

- **Content Focus:** The focus of the content found in the YouTube discussion area would have a great impact on the destination marketing. In fact, the user generated content produced by the users themselves could influence the perception of new visitors. Thus, the analysis of content focus has been taken place. In analyzing the focus of the content, participating users have been found to be discussing about the climate conditions of Sri Lanka before vacationing in the country. For example, "I might go to Sri Lanka next month because I want to go somewhere nice to film, I wanted to go to Spain because I know it will be lovely, sunny and bright for filming but I will be going on my own and I need wheels to get about but I don't have a license, but I'm guessing you don't need a license to hire a moped in Sri Lanka. My only fear is it will rain a lot in Sri Lanka in June" (User - 14). This comment shows that the prospective tourists had expressed interest in visiting to Sri Lanka, but were uncertain about the likely change in climate in the country over a specific time period. Also, the commentary shows that these tourists did have alternatives, which could be selected for satisfying their specific tourism needs. Moreover, the comment reveals that the person was interested in filming the destination and was really looking for a place where the natural beauty is available. An interesting observation made by another participant interacting in the above discussion shows the participative nature of the YouTube users and their willingness to support future tourists to their home country. "Great Video..! Rain is usually trouble during April, May, October and November. Other than that Sri Lanka is Sunny." (User - 5). In developing countries such as Sri Lanka, the analysis simply shows that community-based interactions could be effectively capitalized for destination marketing. Importantly, the enhancement of community-based interactions with a business focus could effectively form an encouraging strategy for tourism promotion through the content of interaction.
- **Content Effectiveness:** In analyzing the effectiveness of the video content, users have been found to be discussing about several points in the YouTube platform which are not relevant for tourism destination marketing. In particular, some of the discussions observed were unrelated to

Table 2. Content analysis results overview

Typology	Criteria	User Comment
Purpose	Content Focus	14, 15
	Content Effectiveness	23, 29, 30
	Content Accuracy	6
Place	Geographical Diversity	33, 34
	Trusting Behaviour	52
Platform	Design of Communication Medium	35, 36, 37, 38, 39, 73, 86, 90, 125
Population	Size of the Population	
	Social Ties	19, 24, 27, 28, 48, 71, 74, 75, 107, 108
Profit Model		

tourism but showed the interpersonal biases of the users, for example, when impromptu remarks and/or opinions were exchanged on matters such as politics. For example, "Nice country but stupid greedy politicians eating everything in their sight. Waste" (User - 23). Although the aforementioned content has been observed in one of the videos, there is an interesting aspect in that users were making comparative suggestions about the tourism destinations. For example the first user mentioned, "All of you are wrong the most beautiful place is Nepal. You can come and visit" (User - 71). The second user made the following comment. "It's more fun in the Philippines!" (User - 74). Overriding both of them, the third user commented as "The most beautiful place in the earth is Pakistan. That's why America wants Pakistan." (User - 75). The above chain of discussion shows that the users were trying to make comparative assessment of different destinations before making a travel plan. This is a critical point whether the purchase decision of tourism products were made by the users. The destination marketing aspirations of hotels should focus on this point, as this is a pre-consumption decision point.

Indeed, the nature of comparative thinking of the consumers could pose challenges to destination marketing through the YouTube platform. Arguably, the users will tend to compare the tourism products and would tend to adapt the high-quality product which has more advantages than what is offered by destination marketers. In addition, the power of user generated content via the YouTube platform is another bottleneck for effective tourism promotion. In fact, an unsatisfied user will definitely spread the word through this kind of platform, which will create a virtual thread for destination marketer through negative electronic word of mouth (e-WOM). Although, these discussions could be positively utilized for any destination marketing efforts; the challenge of tourists shifting to other products is considerably high with regard to this scenario. Therefore, the YouTube designers should be afraid of the effectiveness of content which is presented through the YouTube platform due to the fact that the naturally users are empowered with user generated content for discussing their ideas and experiences about products in the cyberspace. Hence, effective design of YouTube content is crucial for the success of any sorts of efforts towards destination marketing.

- **Content Accuracy:** The next concern to be addressed is the accuracy of content presented through the YouTube platform. A user comment made on Bikinis is an example for how the accuracy of information could affect the destination marketing of hotels located in the developing nations. Inaccurate information presented by the fellow users could possibly mislead the users in tourism related consumption decisions. "Bikinis were never banned in Sri Lanka! Are you studying law? Then you would know that; what you are playing here is a hoax. Only mini-skirts were to be banned in Sri Lanka although with the growth of the tourist population this rule was not imposed! Please check your facts before you comment on a video on your country." (User - 6). This commentary clearly shows how the users are interacting and debating about tourism-related information. In fact, it also implies that the misleading information in the cyberspace could influence either positively or negatively on users' decisions. This needs to be effectively tackled in order to make a positive impact on destination marketing. It is not the scope of this study to investigate whether the type of information presented above is correct or not, but it is essential to make a note that the accuracy of information presented that has not been moderated or filtered by the organizations could lead the reader towards either positive or negative conclusions about the destination consumption decision.
- **Geographic Diversity:** Overall, the articulations show that the users from different countries are taking part in the discussions. For example, one user mentions "Nice video!! You guys are amazing and funny!! Greetings from a Sri Lankan" (User - 19). Another user invites visitors to Nepal mentioning as "All of you are wrong the most beautiful place is Nepal. You can come and visit" (User - 71). Another user mentions that he / she is from India, "Please tell me which video camera have you used? Love from India" (User - 33). This proves the geographic diversity of the

users participating in the YouTube platform related to tourism. Hence, the issue of localization and globalization comes into play at this point. In fact, the content prepared to be broadcasted through the YouTube (video) should be globalized to cater the growing demands of a more diverse user group.

- **Trusting Behavior:** Critically, the trust between users would have a tremendous impact on the destination marketing. Specifically, the trust between users will have a direct influence over the dependability they will have in the comments that were made by others and which, in turn, would have an impact on how much they relied on the information provided by the other user. For example one user mentioned, "Doubtful. It was dark and full of people. The centre is fenced off so no one could even get close to the marble cenotaphs. Videos/photos are forbidden, but the inside is not nearly as pretty as the outside anyway." (User - 52). This comment shows that the user is trying to recall a part of his memories about the same location to validate the dependability and reliability of the content that was uploaded by the other user. As noted, user trusting behavior is critical for effective destination marketing and most, if not all, users tend to make judgments about the uploaded content by comparing it against their original experience.

- **Design of Communication Medium:** The design of communication medium plays a critical role if one is to effectively utilize the YouTube-based interactions for destination marketing. Typically, the YouTube platform encourages a synchronous communication through enabling two-way communications among users. For example the first user mentioned as, "Excellent photos" (User – 35) and the second user replied, "Thank you!" (User - 36), again the first user replies "Well put together video! One day I'll have someone to travel the world with!" (User - 37) the second user replies, "Good luck:)" (User - 38), the first user continues, "This make me want to watch Aladdin" (User – 39). <<The numbering has been done sequentially from user 35 – 39 which is not showing the chain of discussion between two users>>. The above series of exchange, which could be effectively utilized for encouraging tourism-related discussion, shows a pattern of positive dialogue among the participants. Particularly, the travel experience of specific destinations could be discussed by the participants through whom the destination marketer could have a grasp on what are the positive/negative aspects which could encourage/ discourage destination consumption pattern of users.

In contrast, it is also observed that users have a tendency to enjoy the background music used in the videos. For example, "The music is so wrong, could be more fun" (User - 73), another user mentions, "....Could you please tell me which music is being played in the video? Thanks" (User - 86), another comment, "…Nice background music" (User - 125), finally a user "Love the music so much" (User - 90). Here, the addition of relevant simulating music to the video clip appeared to have encouraged interaction among the users with regards to the discussion of music. In particular, the type of music selected for the video should be chosen with care in order to enhance positive interactions among users.

- **Size of the Population:** YouTube-based community interactions on tourism videos are "medium" in size. The word medium means that the size is not too large as well as not small. Although, there is no quantitative measure utilized here, it implies that the size is of a middle one. There are people coming from different countries, but the size is restricted only to the people who have expressed an interest in tourism. There are people with other interests as well but the size is relatively low. Especially, the motive of the group of people who are interacting is restricted to the discussion and sharing of tourism information and experience. Therefore, more targeted messages on YouTube-based communities could entertain further discussion around the topic and eventually could lead to increased destination consumption.

- **Social Ties:** An interesting social tie could be observed among YouTube users. For example, the patriotic feeling of users was an observable phenomenon in the content analyzed as part of this

Table 3. Content Related to Social Ties

"Nice video!! You guys are amazing and funny!! Greetings from a Sri Lankan" (User - 19). "I loved Sri Lanka. I deeply want to return, but this time on a vacation. The people are fantastic. Hope to see you soon Sri Lanka" (User - 24) "I'll see you soon mother Sri Lanka" (User - 27) "Go Sri Lanka" (User - 28) "This is so awesome! Thank you both for the visit inside and out:) very nice place! Hope to visit Agra one day:) and congrats for your engagement" (User - 48) "All of you are wrong the most beautiful place is Nepal. You can come and visit" (User - 71) "It's more fun in the Philippines!" (User - 74) "The most beautiful place in the earth is Pakistan. That's why America wants Pakistan." (User - 75) "You must see them! Iceland literally takes your breath away no matter where you are in the country. Everything is just beautiful! No slums or areas to avoid. Even Reykjavik is gorgeous. In New Zealand - a city is a city like anywhere else. The most beautiful part of New Zealand that we saw was Queenstown, which really reminded me of Iceland**."** (User -107) "I have always wanted to see Iceland and New Zealand! The pictures I see of both of them are just gorgeous!" (User - 108)

research as depicted in Table 3. Particularly, the users are very patriotic when it comes to their home countries and shows a tendency of promoting destinations located in their home countries.

Together, the above content clearly shows that the users have an inherent tendency of promoting tourism destinations belonging to their own countries. This could be effectively utilized for tourism destination marketing through YouTube platform. Simply stated, it is notable that users are positive about developing a dialog with other fellow users with regard to the actual tourism experience they have gained from the destinations they have visited. This is another point for consideration when designing a YouTube based virtual community-based strategy for tourism destination marketing.

Profit Model: In the case of YouTube, the profit model is not through subscriptions or any other related revenue generating efforts. The users are left to interact among themselves and to make business through the platform on through any related business activities. However, the users are observed to be promoting the products through the platform. Typically, the users are promoting tourism destinations located in their own countries. Owing to this, the YouTube-based platform could be featured as a place for exchanging ideas and business commodities through community-based interactions among users. Accordingly, tourism businesses could take advantage through the platform by encouraging effective business oriented discussions to be exchanged among the users.

5. CONCLUSION AND MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

The managerial implications derived as the outcome of data analysis are presented below. The rationale for each implication along with the validation of the implications with past literature is presented in the discussion below.

1. **Presentation of Climate Change Related Information:** The climate change related information of the host country needs to be presented through the YouTube video. Supporting information related to the weather is critical and how tourists could manage it needs also to be presented. In fact, information search is a key factor which influences the decision behavior of tourists (Jacobsen & Munar, 2012).
2. **Information on Natural Beauty of the Destination:** Tourists are interested in filming the destination and look for ways to do this. The natural beauty could be replicated through the tourism video so as to encourage tourists to film the destinations. Online shared videos can

provide mental pleasure to viewers by stimulating fantasies and daydreams, as well as bringing back past travel memories (Tussyadiah & Fesenmaier, 2009).

3. **Encouraging Local User Participation:** Users have an inherent tendency to promote their own countries to others in the VC. The participative nature of YouTube-based community interactions could be utilized to promote tourist destinations. Hence, encouraging local users to participate in YT discussions could be of help. Users have a tendency to form interest groups in the Virtual Community platform based on shared interests and values (Wang et al., 2012).

4. **Inclusion of Comparative Benefits in the Videos:** Users tend to make comparative assessment of tourism destinations through YouTube platform. Therefore, it is beneficial to include some comparative benefits in the videos uploaded in the YouTube, which will eventually make users to think in a comparative manner. This also poses a challenge for tourism marketing, as the users would be able to shift to the other products on finding better tourism destinations. Users have a tendency of using the VC as a reference point for decision making (Valck et al., 2009).

5. **Proper Moderation and Mediation of Content:** Proper moderation and mediation of content posted by the users would ensure the accuracy of content presented under the videos. However, this should not be in contrast with the freedom of speech. Marketers need to use accurate search terms when dealing with the social media due to the power of user generated content which determine the decision behavior of tourists (Xiang & Gretzel, 2010).

6. **Uploading High Quality Videos:** Users have been influenced tremendously by the quality of destination video presented through YouTube. Hence, the quality of video could be featured as an aspect to increase the destination marketing possibilities through the YouTube platform. Online shared videos play a critical role in determining the decision behavior of tourists (Tussyadiah & Fesenmaier, 2009).

7. **Ensuring a Positive Virtual Experience:** Users have a tendency of validating the virtual experience with the actual travel experience, which would influence them to either rely or reject the virtual experience provided through the YouTube. This shows that the trusting behavior of users is critical for effective destination marketing and the users tend to make judgments about the uploaded content by comparing it against their original experience. Therefore, marketers need to ensure that a positive virtual experience is delivered through YouTube platform for the users. Virtual communities are important in establishing members trust on the business (Lu et al., 2010).

8. **Encouraging User Discussions:** The chains of discussions show a pattern of positive dialogue between participants. This could be effectively utilized for encouraging tourism-related discussion among the participants. Particularly, the travel experience of specific destinations could be discussed by the participants through whom the destination marketer could have a grasp on what are the positive / negative aspects for destination marketing and which encourage / discourage destination consumption pattern of users. VC platform is a place for knowledge sharing (Koh & Kim, 2004).

9. **Relevant Simulating Music:** It is observed that users have a tendency to entertain the background music used in the videos. This tendency implies that the addition of relevant simulating music to the video clip will encourage interaction among the users with regard to the discussion of music. Online shared videos play a critical role in determining the decision behavior of tourists (Tussyadiah & Fesenmaier, 2009). This finding could be further extended by adding in music to the influencing factor.

10. **Targeted Messages on YouTube Based Communities:** The motive of the group of people who are interacting is restricted to the discussion and sharing of tourism information and experience. Therefore, more targeted messages on YouTube based communities could entertain further discussion around the topic and eventually could lead to increased destination consumption. YouTube videos have the potential to substantially affect the experience of tourists (Tussyadiah & Fesenmaier, 2009).

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APPENDIX A

User Comments

User	Comments
5	Great Video..! Rain is usually trouble during April, May, October and November. Other than that Sri Lanka is Sunny
6	Bikinis were never banned in Sri Lanka! Are you studying law? Then you would know that; what you are playing here is a hoax. Only mini-skirts were to be banned in Sri Lanka although with the growth of the tourist population this rule was not imposed! Please check your facts before you comment on a video on your country
14	I might go to Sri Lanka next month because I want to go somewhere nice to film, I wanted to go to Spain because I know it will be lovely, sunny and bright for filming but I will be going on my own and I need wheels to get about but I don't have a license, but I'm guessing you don't need a license to hire a moped in Sri Lanka. My only fear is it will rain a lot in Sri Lanka in June
19	Nice video!! You guys are amazing and funny!! Greetings from a Sri Lankan
23	Nice country but stupid greedy politicians eating everything in their sight. Waste
24	I loved Sri Lanka. I deeply want to return, but this time on a vacation. The people are fantastic. Hope to see you soon Sri Lanka
27	I'll see you soon mother Sri Lanka
28	Go Sri Lanka
29	I agree that Hawaii is way too overrated!! The reason why people go to Hawaii is its closer, cheaper to travel to, and most people don't know what Sri Lanka is like
30	That's just plain snobbery. Give credit when it is due. This is not a competition of who/what/where is the best. It is a short clip that showcases the beauty of Sri Lanka in 2 minutes. Learn to appreciate life instead of having the need to make comparisons all the time. You'll be happier too
33	This is the most amazing video of Taj Mahal. I just would like to ask you which video camera have you used? It's as clear as blue ray. Please tell me which video camera have you used? Love from India
34	We used a canon 60d. Cheers
35	Excellent photos
36	Thank You!
37	Well-put together video! One day I'll have someone to travel the world with!
38	Good luck:)
39	This make me want to watch Aladdin
48	This is so awesome! Thank you both for the visit inside and out:) very nice place! Hope to visit Agra one day:) and congrats for your engagement
52	Doubtful. It was dark and full of people. The center is fenced off so no one could even get close to the marble cenotaphs. Videos/photos are forbidden, but the inside is not nearly as pretty as the outside anyway
71	All of you are wrong the most beautiful place is Nepal. You can come and visit
73	The music is so wrong, could be more fun
74	It's more fun in the Philippines!
75	The most beautiful place in the earth is Pakistan. That's why America wants Pakistan.
86	Fantastic photos! Could you please tell me which music is being played in the video? Thanks
90	Love the music so much
107	You must see them! Iceland literally takes your breath away no matter where you are in the country. Everything is just beautiful! No slums or areas to avoid. Even Reykjavik is gorgeous. In New Zealand - a city is a city like anywhere else. The most beautiful part of New Zealand that we saw was Queenstown, which really reminded me of Iceland.
108	I have always wanted to see Iceland and New Zealand! The pictures I see of both of them are just gorgeous!
125	Almost complete. Yet you forgot to include the most primitive countries yet a cursor to the civilization in the East, such as Burma, Bagan temples. Nice background music

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