

**HOW SOCIAL MEDIA WORKS IN DESTINATION MARKETING? A
CONTENT ANALYSIS ON TWITTER**

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Abstract

Twitter is a service that individuals and businesses in many industries are embracing, with the growth of the social networking sites and its ability to deliver real-time information to thousands of people instantly. Twitter is a microblogging platform developed in 2006. Microblogging is a system of communication or an Internet-based publishing platform that consists of sending short text messages with a maximum length of 140 characters through tools such as Twitter, created specifically for this function. Its purpose is to discover what's happening at a given time, share information with other users or offer links to other web sites. Tourism is one of the sectors with a very close relationship with the new information and communication technologies. For destination marketing organizations (DMOs) or convention and visitors bureaus (CVB) marketing has changed dramatically in the last five years with the adoption of online techniques. As marketers have gained more experience, they have seen growing success with interactive tools such as social media. The aim of this research is to describe how destination marketing organizations in Europe are leveraging Twitter to reach potential visitors. This exploratory study also seeks to ascertain a more in-depth look at how DMOs/CVBs in Europe use Twitter and a detailed snapshot into the types of interactions that are occurring with their customers by analysing their tweets.

In this research, data were collected from only DMOs/CVBs in Europe on Twitter. Tweets posted by DMOs/ were content analyzed and compared. All tweets of DMOs/ were coded by two independent coders to determine intercoder reliability. Tweets were categorized into 11 groups (Announcements, Information about local travel deals, Information/news about local business, (Unique) Information about destination/travel, Contests, Replies/messages to followers, Links to website, Social tweets, Encouragement to write and share comments/photos, Re-Tweets and Other). The implications of this research include that microblogging is a potentially rich avenue for DMOs to explore as part of their overall branding strategy. Customer brand perceptions and purchasing decisions appear increasingly influenced by web communications and social networking services, as consumers increasingly use these communication technologies for trusted sources of information, insights, and opinions. Finally, 10 pieces of advice are presented for destinations which decide to utilize Social Media.

Key words: Tourism, destination marketing, social media, twitter.

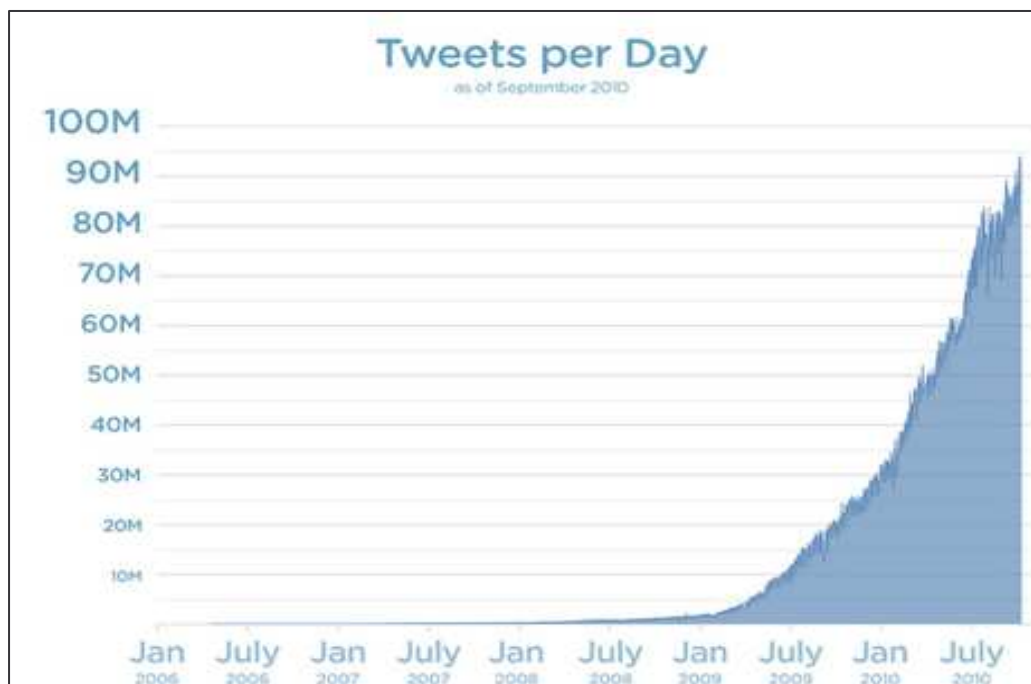
1. Introduction

During the past 10 years, hundreds of millions of Internet users all over the world have visited thousands of social networking sites and social media sites. They have taken advantage of the free services of such sites in order to stay connected online with their offline friends and new online acquaintances, or to share user-created contents, such as comments, photos, videos, bookmarks, etc. (Kim, RanJeong & WonLee, 2010). Tourism is one of the sectors with a very close relationship with the new information and communication technologies. For destination marketing organizations (DMOs), marketing has changed dramatically with the adoption of online techniques. As marketers have gained more experience, they have seen growing success with interactive tools such as social media. Social media and the Internet have fundamentally reshaped the way tourism-related information is distributed and the way people plan for and consume travel (Buhalis & Law, 2008). Social media are playing an increasingly important role as information sources for travellers (Xiang & Gretzel, 2009). Online social networking is also changing the way tourists plan their trips. These websites allow users to interact and provide reviews on local tourist attractions, hotels and other travel related business. Some examples of these websites are Facebook, Myspace and Twitter. In this study, we only focus on the latter one. It is of vital importance that tourism organization managers and destination policy makers understand the antecedents of the tourists' use and adoption of social media before, during and after their trips due to the impact of these collaborative behaviors on tourists' decisions about the choice of all the elements of the trip (destination, accommodation, activities and restaurants etc.) (Parra-López, E., et al., 2010). Therefore, the purpose of this article is to learn how destination marketing organizations are leveraging Twitter to reach current and potential visitors.

2. Twitter

Twitter is a service that individuals and businesses in many industries are embracing, with the growth of the social networking sites and its ability to deliver real-time information to thousands of people instantly. Twitter is a microblogging platform developed in 2006 which became popular in March 2007 after winning the South by Southwest WebAward to the best blog initiative. Microblogging is a system of communication or an Internet-based publishing platform that consists of sending short text messages with a maximum length of 140 characters through tools such as Twitter, created specifically for this function. Its purpose is to discover what's happening at a given time, share information with other users or offer links to other web sites (Twitter, 2010).

Twitter is a real-time information network powered by people all around the world that lets you share and discover what's happening now. Twitter is a simple tool that helps connect businesses more meaningfully with the right audience at the right time. Businesses and organizations of all shapes and sizes are now able to stay connected to their customers. It can be used to quickly share information with people interested in your company, gather real-time market intelligence and feedback, and build relationships with customers, partners and other people who care about your business. Customers can use Twitter to tell a company (or anyone else) that they've had a great—or disappointing—experience with your business, offer product ideas, and learn about great offers they've selected to be notified of (Twitter, 2010). Twitter has over 145 million registered users with nearly 300,000 registered apps in the Twitter ecosystem. said Twitter is seeing on average 90 million Tweets per day and 25% of tweets contain links As you can see from the following chart.




Source: Rao, 2010

According to GoSeeTell Network, a handful of tourism offices began tweeting in 2007 with the majority first posting in 2008. As Twitter gains in popularity and tourism offices look for cost effective marketing tactics. A new study from GoSeeTell revealed that more than half of the tweets generated by tourism organizations in the US and Canada are generated by just 13% of tourism Twitter accounts (GoSeeTell, 2010). A new study reported that almost 50% of the people surveyed are likely to purchase from a brand if they were connected on Twitter (Wee, 2010).

METHODOLOGY

The sample was comprised of 1,690 tweets which came from the following selection process. 100 tweets comes from 19 national DMOs/CVBs were chosen. These 100 tweets were the last hundred tweets (only 4 of 19 have fewer 100) published by DMOs on their twitter profiles. We conducted a cross-sectional survey using content analysis of Twitter status updates (tweets') between August 15 and August 30, 2010. In this research, data were collected from only DMOs/CVBs in Europe on Twitter. We also extended our best effort to find the "official" presence of each specified DMO on Twitter. Tweets posted by DMOs/CVBs were content analyzed and compared. All tweets of DMOs/CVBs were coded by two independent coders to determine intercoder reliability. Intercoder agreement was 89.76% (1.690 tweets) for the tweet topic.

Table 1. Categories, definitions, and examples from Twitter status updates

Category	Definition	Example
Announcements	News about an upcoming event, like an art gallery opening, a concert, etc.	The 3rd Nordic Walking world championship will take place from 10-12 Sep in the region Klopeinensee-Südkarnten in Austria.
Information about local travel deals	Information about all travel deals and suggestions to save money on some travel-related venues in town, get coupons, etc	City break to Zürich from £229 pp incl. 3-star accomodation, flights and taxes
Information/news about local business	Information and news about local busines, like restaurants, hotels, museums, parks, etc.	Portuguese chef Nuno Mendes new restaurant viajante is London's best new restaurant according to harden's
(Unique)Information about destination/travel	Unigue, interesting or amazing information about destination	Old Vine in Maribor, the oldest living specimen on our planet of a noble grape vine that still bears grapes
Encouragement to write and share comments/photos	Posting make users to encouragement to write comment or share photos etc. related about destination	What is the most beautiful in Hungary?
Replies/messages to followers	Posting starts with @ to indicate a direct message to another user.	@example Thanks for your mention!
Links to website	Posting includes a URL	This blog has some really great entries http://blog.hanneketravels.net
Social tweets	Welcome messages, friendly chatter	Hi! Good morning. How are you today?:)
Contests	Information about a contest and prizes	8 more hours to send your stories for the contest!!! Last chance for a free stay in Austria, in 5-star hotel...
Re-Tweets	Posting starts with "RT" to show the content has been previously posted by another user.	 example History of wine exhibition in Florence
Other	Posting does not fit any of these categories	Ministry of Finance projects GDP growth of 3,5% in 2011

Tweets were categorized into 11 groups (Announcements, Information about local travel deals, Information/news about local business, (Unique) Information about destination/travel, Contests, Replies/messages to followers, Links to website, Social tweets, Encouragement to write and share comments/photos, Re-Tweets and Other). We also recorded the number of followers for each Twitter user, the number of people the user was following, and the number of status updates the user had submitted, all standard information on a Twitter page. Once the sample had been defined, the tweets were categorised to perform the subsequent content analysis. For an overview of the resulting categorization, see Table 1: categories, definitions, and examples from Twitter status updates.

FINDINGS

Tourism is an important pillar in almost every country's economy. While some countries are really good at promoting themselves with social media tool, others need some serious work. One of the purpose of this study was introduced to determine this status.

Table 2. Destinations, followers, following and related statistics*.

Country	Screen Name	Followers	Following	Total Tweets	Tweets Per Day (tpd)	Tweets Per Month (tpm)	Tweeting Since
Austria	@austria_uk	406	325	468	2.7	39	2009-10-02
Croatia	@croatia_hr	665	64	431	2.1	26	2009-06-17
Denmark	@DenmarkFeelFree	985	1,044	171	1.1	9	2009-03-05
England	@visitbritain	13,528	7,777	2,954	7.1	142	2009-01-19
Estonia	@visitestonia	83	25	40	2.1	8	2009-05-04
Finland	@OurFinland	844	295	131	1.3	11	2009-11-30
France	@UK_Franceguide	832	61	756	3.7	58	2009-07-28
Germany	@germanytourism	1,152	558	330	1.1	18	2008-11-14
Holland	@visitholland	4,128	1,353	1,734	4.3	86	2009-01-28
Hungary	@hungarytourism	3,325	786	860	4.5	71	2009-04-24
Italy	@enitnewyork	341	312	606	9	202	2010-06-30
Malta	@visitmalta	157	4	30	1.1	3	2009-05-22
Norway	@visitnorway	3,777	312	1,485	3.7	73	2009-02-18
Portugal	@visitportugal	1,222	1,270	1,053	5.6	81	2009-08-18
Romania	@RomaniaTourism	1,802	0	41	1.0	2	2009-04-17
Slovenia	@sloveniainfo	350	346	93	1.5	9	2009-06-26
Spain	@spain	17,208	1,319	616	3	36	2008-12-19
Seweden	@Sweden	2,228	308	226	2.6	13	2009-01-28
Switzerland	@MySwitzerland_e	1,149	73	162	1.3	13	2009-10-06

*Last updated on Sempember 15

A complete list of DMOs and their Twitter usernames used in the study are found in Table 2. Also Table 2 summarizes the statistics of 19 DMOs' tweets (status updates). DMOs have followers between 83 and 17,208. One measure of a Twitter user's effectiveness is the number of followers it has attracted. The first five organizations in this study, by followers are; Spain (17,208), England (13,528), Holland (4,128), Norway (3,777) and Hungary (3,325). According to Table 2, the following numbers vary between 0 and 7,777. England has the most following. Another measure is by number of tweets. In this study, the top five most active Twitter users are; England (2,954), Holland (1,734), Norway (1,485), Portugal (1,053) and Hungary (860). Besides this, according to the average of tweets per day and tweets per month, Italy is the most active user. Table 2 also showed that the opening date of DMOs' Twitter profiles. It can be seen that all of DMOs have activated their profiles in 2009 except Germany (2008) and Italy (2010).

Frequencies and percentages of tweet categories were given in the Table 3. This table also showed breakdown of tweets by country. Of the 1,690 status updates posted by the remaining 19 DMOs to find out what they are saying via Twitter was evaluated. According to Table 3, there are 11 groups categorized by tweets. First group was "announcements". This category included 20.35% (N= 344) of the tweets analysed. Second group was "contest" and this category contains 3.49% (N= 59) of the tweets. The third group was "Unique Information about destination/travel". This category included 14.08% (N=238) of the tweets. The fourth group was "Information about local travel deals". This group contains 5.14% (N=87) of tweets.

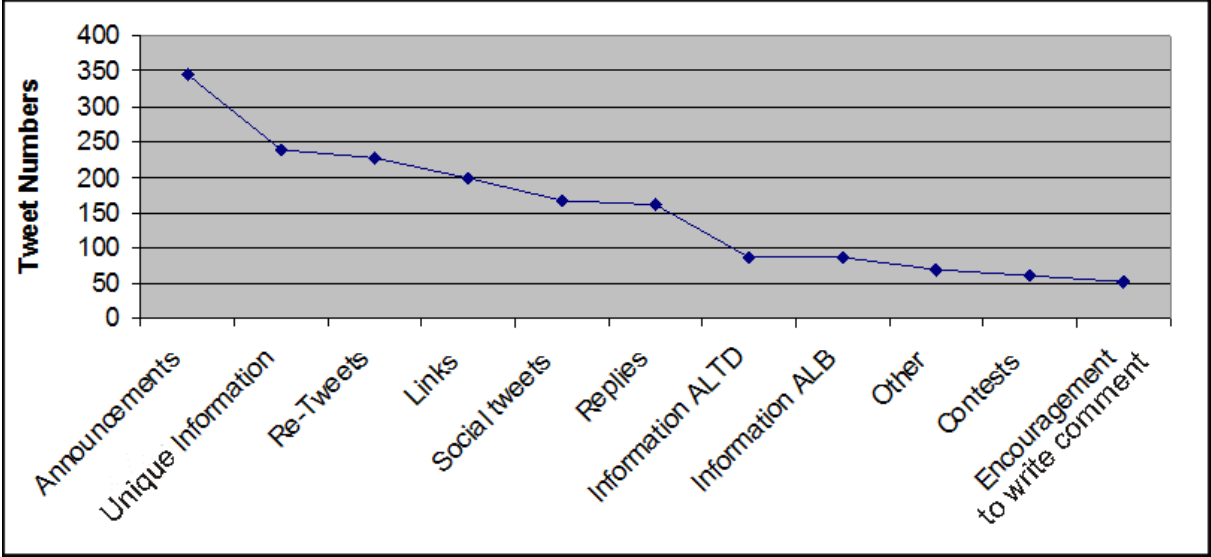
The fifth group was "Information/news about local business" and this category included 5.08% (N=86) of tweets. The sixth group was "Links to website". This group contains 11.83% (N=200) of tweets. The seventh group was "Replies/messages to followers" and this category included 9.52% (N=161) of tweets. The eighth group was "Social tweets". This category contains 9.88% (N=167) of tweets. The ninth group was "Encouragement to write and share comments/photos". This category included 3.07% (N=52) of tweets. The tenth group was "Re-Tweets" and this category contains 13.37% (N=226) of tweets. The last group was "others" and this category included 4.14% (N=70) of tweets. According to Table 3 only four DMOs have tweets less than 100. These DMOs were; (a) Estonia, (b) Malta, (c) Romania and (d) Slovenia.

Table 3. Frequencies and percentages of tweet categories

Destination	Announcements		Contests		(Unique) Information about destination/travel		Information about local travel deals		Information/news about local business		Links to website		Replies/messages to followers		Social tweets		Encouragement to write and share comments/photos		Re-Tweets		Other		Total	
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
Austria	26	26	5	5	9	9	1	1	4	4	13	13	11	11	5	5	1	1	20	20	5	5	100	100
Croatia	20	26	21	21	1	1	1	1	1	1	14	14	4	4	26	26	5	5	5	5	2	2	100	100
Denmark	25	25	13	13	12	12	8	8	4	4	16	16	2	2	9	9	3	3	2	2	6	6	100	100
England	12	19	4	4	5	5	-	-	1	1	2	2	32	32	8	8	5	5	27	27	4	4	100	100
Estonia	9	22.5	-	-	8	20	-	-	5	12.5	9	22.5	-	-	-	-	-	-	5	12.5	4	10	40	100
Finland	12	12	3	3	13	13	2	2	5	5	20	20	21	21	15	15	-	-	4	4	5	5	100	100
France	20	20	3	3	24	24	15	15	10	10	8	8	-	-	6	6	11	11	-	-	3	3	100	100
Germany	68	68	-	-	5	5	10	10	7	7	6	6	-	-	-	-	-	-	4	4	-	-	100	100
Holland	14	14	-	-	9	9	6	6	3	3	5	5	38	38	17	17	3	3	1	1	4	4	100	100
Hungary	16	16	-	-	24	24	3	3	11	11	10	10	3	3	7	7	2	2	16	16	8	8	100	100
Italya	-	-	-	-	2	2	-	-	-	-	8	8	9	9	5	5	-	-	76	76	-	-	100	100
Malta	9	33.3	-	-	9	33.3	-	-	-	-	7	25.9	-	-	1	3.7	1	3.7	-	-	-	-	27	100
Norway	3	3	-	-	20	20	4	4	4	4	15	15	20	20	4	4	-	-	30	30	-	-	100	100
Portugal	22	22	-	-	23	23	6	6	14	14	11	11	1	1	11	11	-	-	6	6	6	6	100	100
Romania	18	45	1	2.5	10	25	-	-	-	-	5	12.5	-	-	-	-	2	5	-	-	4	10	40	100
Slovenia	12	14.4	4	4.8	25	30.1	1	1.2	1	1.2	18	21.6	3	3.6	8	9.6	-	-	10	12	1	1.2	83	100
Spain	26	26	-	-	13	13	-	-	-	-	4	4	8	8	28	28	15	15	-	-	6	6	100	100
Sweden	10	10	-	-	14	14	4	4	6	6	20	20	6	6	12	12	4	4	16	16	8	8	100	100
Switzerland	22	22	5	5	12	12	26	26	10	10	9	9	3	3	5	5	-	-	4	4	4	4	100	100
Total	344	-	59	-	238	-	87	-	86	-	200	-	161	-	167	-	52	-	226	-	70	-	1,690	
% of Total		20.35		3.49		14.08		5.14		5.08		11.83		9.52		9.88		3.07		13.37		4.14		100

Table 4 was created by using information which adapted from table 3 to make this frequencies more understandable and clearer. Table 4 showed detailed breakdown of eleven categories. The most common category was “Announcements” which representing 20.25% of all the tweets. This category was including a range of updates about news related an upcoming event, like a festival, an art gallery opening, a concert in destiniton. The second most common category was “Unique information about destination/travel, representing 14.08% of all the tweets. In this category, some updates simply included interesting and amazing information, such as “Green Fact: Slovenia accounts for less than 0.004% of the Earth’s surface but is home to over 23.800 animal species”.

Table 4. Breakdown of categories



The third most prevalent category was “Re-Tweets,” which included a variety Posting starts with “RT” to show the content has been previously posted by another user. This category was representing 13.37% of all the tweets. Respectively, other categories include:

- Links to website, 11.8%
- Social tweets, 9.88%
- Replies/messages to followers, 9.52%.

Besides these, less frequently used types are presented below:

- Information about local travel deals, 5.14%
- Information/news about local business, 5.08%
- Contest, 3.49% and
- Encouraging tweets to write and share comments/photos, 3.07%

DISCUSSION

Twitter is a useful platform to build a brand's reputation online – however, a brand isn't only build by marketers themselves, but it also depends on how consumers perceive it to be. Through user-generated content like tweets, conversations with friends and product reviews, consumers determine a large part of a brand's image too. Social Media is a very active and fast-moving domain. It is therefore crucial for DMOs to have a set of guidelines that can be applied to any form of Social Media especially to Twitter. Social networking is all about being part of a conversation. To be successful with social media, just like in a conversation, you have to be prepared to listen, you have to have something interesting to say, you have to contribute something new so that people are bothered to listen, and you have to engage on the level of everyone else and avoid preaching. Sticking to those rules will ensure success in social media as a business. Therefore, ten pieces of advice are presented below for destinations which decide to utilize Social Media.

- After registering on Twitter, complete input user profile information which includes a link to the DMO's Web site, avatar and background reflecting the organization, and transparent bio.
- Search for groups and individuals' interests on social networking sites like Twitter and Facebook to find out what people are saying about your destination.
- Following twitterers (people who use Twitter) allows you to see what interests potential visitors. Once some tweets have been posted, find other twitterers with an interest in the destination. Begin with twitterers living in the community.
- When a twitterer follows the DMO, follow them back. Think that they are a potential visitor and have the potential to bring revenue into your community. They most likely have a sincere interest in the destination. Send new followers a genuine thank you tweet or direct message and let them know you are available if they need trip planning assistance.
- Follow local newspapers, news stations, travel journalists, and bloggers. Utilize tools on the Web to find and see who your followers are following. Monitoring is vital for social media marketing success.
- Find a balance between posting events and posting about life in and around your destination. Reply and interact with your followers but remember to keep it professional. The most successful tweeting DMOs have passionate twitterers who interact with followers and demonstrate they are real people.

- Extend friendships to tourists to maintain relationships and keep them coming back. Use photo sharing sites to link pictures taken by tourists to create a community among people who are interested in your destination.
- Twitter travel deals and packages, as well as updates on area construction, new businesses, events and festivals. Offer contests and promotions through social media outlets to help increase your followers.
- Create customized URLs to Facebook and Twitter to provide another contact option for tourists. (e.g. facebook.com/yourdmohere). Create a network or online community among all businesses in your area to provide more information to your future tourists, as well as generate more traffic back to your profiles. Post videos on a YouTube account of different activities to participate in at your destination.
- Some empty DMO accounts sit in the twitter and they were probably registered. An idle account is not effective marketing. The successful DMOs using Twitter are consistent. DMOs should be monitoring their Twitter accounts and should be updated their profiles regularly.

Twitter allows tourism offices to increase visibility and create buzz about their destination. Utilizing the micro-blogging site is a cost effective way for DMOs to send their targeted message to potential visitors. Also, Twitter provides countless opportunities for DMOs to interact with customers first hand, and even tap on influential users who can create an even bigger impact for their brand.

Limitations And Further Research

This study has limitations that warrant discussion. Though the findings indicate that DMOs need to do more to enhance their information dissemination and involvement strategies, it should be noted that only 19 DMOs were examined. The sample also consisted primarily of organizations in Europe, so other organizations may use social networking sites differently in other countries. Also only last 100 tweets of DMOs were analyzed. These limitations do not undermine the importance of the research, but they give ideas for future research. Research focusing on social media services and microblogs is still at an early stage. Further studies could offer insights into how DMO change their social media strategies over time, and case studies should be conducted to help offer insights for other organizations based on efforts that have both succeeded and failed.

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