

Residents as Travel Destination Information Providers: An Online Community Perspective

Journal of Travel Research
49(4) 400–413
© 2010 SAGE Publications
Reprints and permission:
sagepub.com/journalsPermissions.nav
DOI: 10.1177/0047287509346856
http://jtr.sagepub.com


Irem Arsal,¹ Kyle M. Woosnam,² Elizabeth D. Baldwin,³
and Sheila J. Backman³

Abstract

Prior research regarding residents and tourists has focused on their commonalities and interactions occurring on-site. What is missing from the literature is an examination of residents as information sources to potential tourists. Online travel communities offer such a viable venue. This study has two main purposes. The first is to examine the influence residents may have on travel decisions and identify the types of travel decisions they influence. The second is to compare the influence residents have on travel decisions with other online community members (i.e., experienced travelers). Treemapper is used to identify the country forums, and thematic networks are used for the analysis of influence of eWOM. The results reveal that nearly one-third of the communication threads (including 1,699 postings from 713 contributing members) have been influential for members. Residents are more influential in accommodations and food and beverage recommendations, whereas experienced travelers are more influential in the destination information category.

Keywords

residents, information source, online community, influence, eWOM

Introduction

Information search is a central theme in the travel and tourism literature. It is an important concept particularly for tourism products since they are intangible in nature and delivered in places different from home (Lovelock and Wright 1999). Thus, potential travelers engage in information search to enhance the quality of a proposed trip and to decrease the level of uncertainty surrounding the functional, financial, psychological, and social risks (Fodness and Murray 1997). Hence, the information search process is important for marketing management decisions (Wilkie and Dickson 1985) and for consumers making travel-related decisions.

Nevertheless, travel planning is a complex process that consists of different decisions (Jeng and Fesenmaier 2002). Moreover, there are many different information sources that can influence travelers' vacation decisions. These sources include personal sources, such as the information obtained from friends and relatives through personal word of mouth (WOM), and marketer-dominated paid forms of communication, such as information retrieved from hotels, resorts, and destination management organizations (Fodness and Murray 1998).

In addition to these information sources, the Internet is a commonly used platform that enables travelers to search more conveniently for information. The advantages of using

the Internet are quick access to information, the opportunity to gather all information from a single source, the time convenience of search (e.g., search can be conducted whenever the user wants; Beliveau and Garwood 2001), and better service quality (Heung 2003). Disadvantages include the overwhelming amount of information, the difficulty of knowing where to look for relevant information, and the time-consuming aspect of the search (Beliveau and Garwood 2001).

Various information sources exist within the Internet, such as destination Web sites, commercial Web sites (for hotels, restaurants, airlines, etc.), and online communities. Online communities serve as information centers where individuals can search for information conveniently and cost-effectively. They are used for retrieving information, maintaining connections, developing relationships, and making travel decisions (Stepchenkova, Mills, and Jiang 2007). Furthermore, online communities are becoming influential information sources since travelers have more

¹MODUL University Vienna, Austria

²Texas A&M University, College Station

³Clemson University, South Carolina

Corresponding Author:

Irem Arsal, Department of Tourism and Hospitality Management, MODUL University Vienna, Am Kahlenberg 1, 1190 Wien, Austria
Email: irem.arsal@modul.ac.at

trust in peers than marketing organizations (Gretzel, Yoo, and Purifoy 2007). In addition, the amount and quality of information available in online communities has been found to be more valuable than information that has been accumulated by conventional published content for its members (Ridings, Gefen, and Arinze 2002) since they provide current, enjoyable, and reliable information (Gretzel, Yoo, and Purifoy 2007). During the travel planning stage, travelers' information search focuses on information such as where to go, where to stay, how to go, and what to do at the destination.

In online communities, members communicate through postings as a form of word of mouth (WOM) called electronic word of mouth (eWOM). Dellarocas (2003) points out that eWOM is different from traditional WOM in three ways: (1) the scale of eWOM is larger because of the Internet's low cost and communication capabilities, (2) eWOM gives organizations the ability to monitor and control their operation, and (3) the absence of contextual cues and not knowing who the information provider is makes it more difficult to interpret the subjective information in online interaction. For organizations, online feedback mechanisms affect brand building and customer acquisition, product development, quality control, and supply-chain quality assurance activities (Dellarocas 2003).

The main reason for travelers engaging in online travel communities is to get firsthand information from experienced travelers who have already been to the destination. Such information sources are the most influential and most preferred in the pre-trip stage of travel decision making (Crotts 1999). Moreover, these experienced travelers can also be destination residents who provide information in the online travel community. Not only do potential travelers and experienced travelers seek travel information, but residents of the destination engage in travel-related discussions in online travel communities.

Nevertheless, previous research on resident and traveler interactions does not examine the role of residents as information providers. Tourism research has primarily examined residents as the group of people most likely to be affected by the impacts of tourism at the destination. Resident research has studied topics such as demographics of residents and perceived tourism impacts on the community (Bastias-Perez and Var 1995), residents' perceptions of economic aspects of tourism (Tomljenovic and Faulkner 2000; Tosun 2000), residents' perceptions of environmental outcomes of tourism (Ap and Crompton 1998; Lawson et al. 1998), residents' perceptions of political factors on tourism (Reed 1997; Ritchie 1993), and social impacts of tourism on the community (Perdue, Long, and Allen 1990).

In online environments, residents and travelers have the opportunity to interact with each other. This interaction may take place through eWOM communication such as travel blogs, chat, and online community forums. In addition, the interaction occurs before the traveler arrives at the destination and may influence where travelers visit and their choice of accommodation and restaurants.

This study has two main purposes. The first is to examine the influence residents may have on travel decisions and to identify the types of travel decisions they influence. The second is to compare the influence residents have on travel decisions with other online community members (i.e., experienced travelers).

Literature Review

Evaluation of travel and tourism services is a complex process for consumers. This complexity is due to the characteristics of service goods: intangibility, perishability, heterogeneity, and simultaneous production and consumption (Mehta, Lalwani, and Ping 2001). Furthermore, these characteristics bring higher perceived risk to decision making, and the degree of personal influence increases as the degree of perceived risk increases (Perry and Hamm 1969). Travel is perceived to be a high-risk consumption. To reduce the risks, consumers seek information from others with travel experience (Mehta, Lalwani, and Ping 2001).

Online communities are defined as "groups of people with common interests and practices that communicate regularly and for some duration in an organized way over the Internet through a common location or mechanism" (Ridings, Gefen, and Arinze 2002, p. 273). Research concerning online communities in the tourism field is a new and growing subject. Existing research includes the importance of online communities in tourism marketing over the Internet (Dellaert 1999), needs of online travel community members, reasons and factors affecting members' level of contribution in online travel communities, antecedents of online travel community activity (Wang and Fesenmaier 2003), sense of virtual community's effect on loyalty and travel product purchase (Kim, Lee, and Hiemstra 2004), and the influence of trust and interactivity on flow experience and online travel community members' purchase intentions (Wu and Chang 2005).

Travel blogs are also a form of eWOM and can influence travel decisions because of the intangibility of tourism products and difficulty of evaluating before consumption (Litvin, Goldsmith, and Pan 2008). Moreover, consumers use eWOM to gather authentic, rich, and unsolicited consumer feedback from those with travel experience (Pan, MacLaurin, and Crotts 2007).

According to Ridings and Gefen (2004), reasons for getting involved in online communities include social support, entertainment, and social relations (e.g., making new friends). Establishing personal relationships in online communities result in more participation in online community activities (Kim, Lee, and Hiemstra 2004). In addition, Ridings and Gefen (2004) indicate that one of the main incentives for joining online communities is information exchange. Because of exchanging information and reading online reviews, travelers will likely save time in decision making while making more informed buying decisions (Gretzel, Yuan, and Fesenmaier 2000). It is well known that many consumers value other

consumers' advice regarding products and services that they desire to purchase (Punj and Stealin 1983).

The Influence of eWOM

Although there is no clear definition of influence, Park and Lessig (1977) examined when an influence is accepted. According to the researchers, an influence is accepted when it is "perceived as enhancing the individual's knowledge of his environment and/or his ability to cope with some aspect of this environment" (Park and Lessig 1977), such as purchasing a product.

The influence of eWOM and whether it affects consumer behaviors is a relatively new subject for researchers. Previous research has shown that consumers use online reviews to guide buying decisions across a variety of product classes (Guernsey 2000), such as videogames and movie revenues. Bounie et al. (2005) indicate that online consumer reviews of video games positively affect purchasing behavior. In addition, online movie ratings were found to be better predictors of future movie revenues than movies' marketing budgets, professional critic reviews, and other variables previously used (Dellarocas, Awad, and Zhang 2004).

The influence of product reviews in travel decision making depends on the decision-making stage and the type of tourism product (Ricci and Wietsma 2006). For example, a traveler booking hotels consults reviews at the end of the process to increase confidence in his or her decisions. However, Ricci and Wietsma (2006) found that reviews were more important at the beginning of the process for choosing activities at the destination. The authors found no significant difference between positive and negative reviews. Rather, positive reviews were used for understanding and increasing product knowledge whereas negative reviews were used for product decision confidence.

Both travelers and travel suppliers are generating content for the Internet that is used as an information source by other potential travelers. User-generated content in an online community has been found to be important information for travel planning. Gretzel, Yoo, and Purifoy (2007) indicate that online travel reviews are perceived to provide more up-to-date, enjoyable, and reliable information than information retrieved from travel service providers. eWOM is one type of user-generated content that has been found to influence different types of consumer decisions such as finding accommodations. Recent studies have focused on the influence of one type of user-generated content: online reviews of travel decisions (Gretzel, Yoo, and Purifoy 2007; Ricci and Wietsma 2006).

Influence and Information Source

Individuals may want to acquire products since they believe other consumers have better information regarding the products than they do (Bonabeau 2004). The other consumers who we believe have the right information are called the reference

group, which is an individual or group of individuals that influences an individual's behavior (e.g., family members, political leaders, local communities) (Bearden and Etzel 1982). Reference groups are classified in different ways: (1) type of contact—primary and secondary groups; (2) formality structure of groups—formal and informal groups; and (3) attraction—aspirational and dissociative groups (Blackwell, Miniard, and Engel 2001).

Reference group influence can be classified in three forms: normative, value-expressive, and informational. Normative influence is making decisions to gain approval of other group members (Henningesen and Henningesen 2003). Thus, individuals can accept group behaviors and beliefs but also comply with group norms without accepting all the behaviors and beliefs (Homans 1961). Value-expressive influence is related to an individual's association with a positive referent in order to enhance one's self-concept or to dissociate oneself with a negative referent (Bearden and Etzel 1982). Informational influence concerns making decisions to reach the best possible decision (Henningesen and Henningesen 2003) and accepting information obtained from others as evidence about reality (Deutsch and Gerard 1955).

Reference groups also influence decisions, especially travel-related decisions. Bearden and Etzel (1982) show that publicly consumed products and services are more subject to reference group influence. Hsu, Kang, and Lam (2006) found that family and friends were the most influential reference group regarding decisions made to visit Hong Kong. Moreover, reference group influences are related to individuals' values, attitudes, motivations, and perceptions.

Influence and Product Type

Consumers' purchase decisions are also influenced by the type of product and information sources used (Bearden and Etzel 1982; Childers and Rao 1992). Products can be classified as either having search qualities that consumers discover before purchasing or experience qualities that cannot be understood before purchasing (Nelson 1970). Tourism products are experience goods, making it impossible to evaluate them before the actual experience; thus consumers may rely on recommendations of others. Senecal and Nantel (2004) indicate that recommendations for experience goods are significantly more influential than recommendations for search products. This type of recommendation comes from WOM via family and friends that have experience with the tourism product. Previous research has found that WOM from friends and family is the most sought-after information source for travel decisions (Bansal and Voyer 2000; Bieger and Laesser 2004).

In online travel communities, influence of members takes place through online postings and is based on self-reported behavior. The actual behaviors are not visible to other forum members or users. Moreover, low entry barriers and easy exit of the communities make it easier for individuals who do not agree with the community's beliefs. Thus, normative and

value-expressive influence is less likely to occur in online environments. In contrast, informational influence may occur in online travel communities when facts, evidence, or other travel-related information is being discussed by community members via postings. Furthermore, shared information that has been mentioned or repeated by other community members has the potential to have more influence on decision making because this indicates the importance of the information for the group and decision-making process (Henningsen and Henningsen 2003).

Resident Research

The past few decades have seen a surge in studies involving residents within tourist destinations (Jennings and Nickerson 2006) due in large part to the seminal works regarding tourism impacts by Smith (1977) and Mathieson and Wall (1982). Each work focuses not only on the sociocultural, economic, and environmental impacts tourism brings to residents but also on the role residents play in providing services to tourists in destinations.

Following such impact studies, research concerning residents' attitudes began to shift toward locals' perceptions of tourism development (Andereck et al. 2005; Gursoy, Jurovski, and Uysal 2002; King, Pizam, and Milman 1993; Lankford and Howard 1994; McGehee and Andereck 2004; Perdue, Long, and Allen 1990; Snaith and Haley 1999). This line of research continues to be popular in tourism literature. In fact, based on the authors' examination of articles within *Annals of Tourism Research* and the *Journal of Travel Research*, approximately 10% of the empirical studies during the past two decades involved an examination of residents' attitudes toward tourism. In numerous studies regarding resident attitudes toward tourism, research has shown the support or positive attitudes residents have for tourism development despite potential negative impacts (McGehee and Andereck 2004).

The research on residents has focused on attitudes toward tourism, specifically on determining the best predictor of such attitudes. Harrill (2004) claims that there are three main factors that have been examined as influencing attitudes toward tourism development: socioeconomic factors, spatial factors, and economic dependency. At best, these factors have produced mixed findings (Harrill 2004; McGehee and Andereck 2004). The major consistent finding in this research is that individuals who are either dependent on tourism or perceive a greater gain tend to have a more positive perception of tourism's economic impact than other residents (Lankford and Howard 1994; Sirakaya, Teye, and Sonmez 2002).

The research concerning resident attitudes is a reflection of the disconnection between residents and tourists (Aramberri 2001). What results is the us-versus-them (Evans-Pritchard 1989; Laxson 1991) or self-versus-other mentality (Wearing and Wearing 2001). Ultimately, such characterization of the

relationship perpetuates the divide between residents and tourists as Aramberri claims, with residents providing a service to tourists in exchange for payment on-site.

Some researchers have focused on the commonalities between residents and tourists beyond that of residents providing services for tourists at the destination. Snepenger et al. (2003) conducted a study of a downtown shopping area in Bozeman, Montana (utilized by residents and tourists), and found that high-use locals were the most comfortable socializing and sharing space with tourists. Cohen's (1996) work concerning hill tribes and hunter-gatherer groups in Thailand showcased how both residents and tourists share the belief that living in harmony with nature, escaping developed contemporary society, and getting back to cultural roots is important to life. In a study examining residents and tourists in Port Douglas, Queensland, Sherlock (2001) found that representatives from both parties saw the seaside area as an ideal location to leave the big city behind and escape society. Each of these works has focused on the commonalities of residents and tourists occurring on-site.

What is missing from the literature is an examination of residents being a source of information to potential tourists prior to visiting. In Bieger and Laesser's study (2004), residents of a destination are an implied source of information for travelers, likely fitting under the categories of "Internet" and "other" (both of which were found to be two of the most important source of information for travelers); however, residents are not a group the authors explicitly examine. Similar findings were presented by Gursoy and Umbreit (2004), where Internet and other sources were consulted most across nationalities. Research examining residents as a source of information could potentially capture the link between parties that transcends the thought of residents being separate from tourists (Wearing and Wearing 2001) as residents altruistically share information about the place in which they live to help potential travelers. Online travel communities offer a viable venue.

In online travel communities, different types of members, such as residents, potential travelers, or experienced travelers communicate through eWOM. In this case the residents and experienced travelers are travel information sources because they can answer potential travelers' questions. Lang (2000) claimed that "communicating with other travelers online" and "finding other like-minded host country contacts or travelers" were reasons for engaging in online communities and searching for information about destinations before traveling. The residents are especially important for potential travelers because residents are already on-site and have insider knowledge about a destination. Nonetheless, experienced travelers who have been to the destination are also important sources as they transfer information via eWOM (Yoo and Gretzel 2008). However, it is likely that the influence of each member type will vary by travel decisions.

Based on a review of literature, three research questions were formulated for this study:

Table 1. Analyzed Country Forums

Region	Country	Total Number of Postings	Total Number of Threads	Average Direct Response
Africa	Guinea	148	9	16.40
	South Africa	3,911	686	5.70
	Ghana	784	143	5.48
	Morocco ^a	4,556	902	5.05
Western Europe	Netherlands	1,680	269	6.25
	Belgium	575	110	5.22
	Germany	2,673	520	5.14
	Spain ^a	6,236	1,225	5.09

a. Indicates the most number of threads in one country category

1. What influence do residents have on travel decisions through online communities?
2. What are the various travel decisions residents may influence through online communities?
3. How do residents' influence on travel decisions compare with other online community members such as experienced travelers?

Research Methods

To have an in-depth understanding of member types and their influence on different travel decisions, qualitative data collection and analysis of online postings were used in concert with classification methods to examine residents' potential influence on travel decisions and to identify the types of travel decisions they influence. This study was conducted on Thorn Tree Forum, which is part of Lonely Planet's Web site, located at <http://www.lonelyplanet.com/thorntree/index.jspa>. Thorn Tree is an online travel community, where users become members to post messages in the community. One becomes a member of the forum by registering an email address and user name on the Web site. However, anyone who visits the community Web page can read the forum on destinations, what to pack, and traveling companions. For the current study, data were collected for eight months from numerous country forums.

The data used in this study includes online travel community threads. The basic unit of analysis is a posting. A thread is a set of hierarchically organized postings (i.e., message written in the online community forum) under one lead posting. At the time of data collection, the community Web site had 14 world regions, 204 country forums, and 48,431 threads, which totaled 230,698 postings. The data were collected for eight months until no new topics were being discussed and determined by the authors to have reached saturation. Trustworthiness of this determination was checked by two other researchers working with these data to provide interrater reliability.

To identify the country forums for data analysis, Microsoft's treemapper (data visualization software) was used.

The treemaps represent the data visually by treating each country as a box whose area is proportional to the number of average responses to postings. Since the aim of this study was to identify the influence of eWOM, the more postings in a particular thread, the more likely evidence of influence would be available for analysis. Thus the threads with the most number of postings were chosen for analysis. To do this, treemaps were drawn for each of the 14 regions and the top three countries that had the most volume of discussion and the country that had the most number of threads were identified. In these four identified country forums, the top 10 most discussed threads were selected for analysis. All the selected threads were coded according to discussion topics. To have maximum variation in the data, two world regions, Western Europe and Africa, were chosen since the discussion topics were not similar in these regions and also covered all discussion topics in the other world regions. From these two world regions, the four countries that were previously selected were included in the data analysis. The final data sample included 74 threads from eight countries in the Africa and Western Europe forums. Country forums that were analyzed in this study are shown in Table 1. The table shows the distribution of postings in each country forum including average direct response for each thread that was calculated by dividing the total number of postings a country forum has by the total number of threads of the same country.

Thematic networks were used to frame the data. These networks are web-like illustrations of main themes in the posting data (Attride-Sterling 2001). Thematic networks analysis is based on argumentation theory (Toulmin 1958), which is a structured method for analyzing production of arguments (van Rees 2007). Brockriede and Ehninger (1960) refer to Toulmin in their description of an argument and define *argument* as the "movement from accepted data, through a warrant, to a claim" (Brockriede and Ehninger 1960). Three of the components for analyzing arguments identified by Toulmin (1958) are as follows: (1) *data* are evidence such as facts or opinions and are the point of departure for the argument, (2) *claim* is the conclusion of the argument, (3) *warrant* refers to the step needed to move from data to claim and answers the

question “How do you get there?” It is the process of taking accepted data to a conclusion (claim), thus verifying the claim to be true (Brockriede and Ehninger 1960). In parallel with this theory, the goal of thematic networks analysis is “to explore the understanding of an issue or the signification of an idea, rather than to reconcile conflicting definitions of a problem” (Attride-Sterling 2007, p.127).

Repeated themes were identified and analysis was conducted in three steps. The first step was identifying the *basic themes*, which are the lowest-order themes emerging from the textual data. Basic themes were then grouped together into clusters of similar concepts, called *organizing themes*. According to Attride-Sterling, “organizing themes simultaneously group the main ideas proposed by several basic themes and dissect the main assumptions underlying a broader theme that is especially significant in the texts as a whole” (p. 389). Finally, the *global theme* was identified, which “summarizes and makes sense of clusters of lower order themes abstracted from and supported by the data” (Attride-Sterling 2001, p. 389). This network was then used as a frame for the qualitative analysis of the threads.

Data analysis was conducted in multiple iterative steps, beginning with examining each thread to identify whether that thread was influential in members’ travel planning. In this study, the influence was identified by reading each thread and finding out if the member who started the thread (also known as original poster) stated that he or she will include the recommendations in the postings in his or her travel plans in each identified discussion topic.

Influential threads were then analyzed by topic discussion and member type. Members were categorized as experienced travelers, residents, potential travelers, and unknown members based on keywords in the threads (i.e., “my provincial capital,” “hometown,” or “we”). On the other hand, experienced travelers indicated they had been to the destination by postings such as “I was in Amsterdam the day after Christmas this past year.” This categorization was also confirmed by looking at each member’s profile on the community where they wrote names of countries they have visited and the country they reside. According to Pan, MacLaurin, and Crotts (2007), it is important to capture where members are from given that the role of information providers can vary depending on a member’s place of birth and residence (De Mooij 2004). Member categorization was based on country forums. One member can be a resident in one forum and an experienced traveler in another country forum. For instance, a resident member of Netherlands who has been to Germany was categorized as a resident in Netherlands and an experienced traveler in Germany forum. Moreover, in the same way an original poster (OP) can be a resident and an experienced traveler in three different thread discussions.

To identify which member type was influential in each thread, the number of postings that answered an OP’s question and the member type of posters were identified and counted

until the OP indicated that he or she will include the recommendation (from the postings) in his or her travel plans. The results were categorized based on the influence of member type. If the number of postings were equal for all types of members, then the member type that proposed the idea first was considered influential in that thread.

Reliability and Validity of Methods

During the research process, the researchers observed online community activity and did not interfere with online community discussions in any way. Observation gives the researcher the opportunity to see the phenomenon firsthand. The researcher was a complete observer and community members were not aware of the fact that they were research subjects. Thus, the researcher’s presence did not influence the study subjects. However, as in all qualitative research, the researcher was the research instrument and as such worked with others through each step and co-coding of data for interrater reliability. Any discrepancy was discussed and checked with others to address bias. This was done with the authors as a whole and outside academics in the travel and tourism field.

Internal validity in qualitative research refers to the congruence of findings with reality (Merriam 2002). Triangulation, member checks, and peer review are the most common methods used for ensuring internal validity. To ensure validity of results, peer review was conducted with another researcher who was familiar with the research.

In addition, data were collected from eight different countries. Discussion topics in Western Europe were similar to each other, in the same way African forum discussion topics were similar among themselves. Analyzed country forums included 713 members that contributed to online community postings. Since the researcher did not ask clarification questions, the data were collected from 713 members to ensure data validity.

The audit trail is a method used for reliability of a qualitative study. It is the description of how the data were collected, how the categories were derived, and how the study was conducted overall (Merriam 2002). The researcher used an audit trail as a method for ensuring reliability of the research by writing memos throughout the conduct of the study, and then having others review the trail of analysis.

External validity or generalizability in qualitative research can be conceptualized by user or reader generalizability, in which the readers determine whether the results of the study are applicable in their context (Merriam 2002). Also, including a thick description of the study and maximizing variation using purposeful sampling are other methods for ensuring generalizability in qualitative research, often referred to as transferability. Therefore, conclusions are clearly limited to similar contexts and may possibly be transferred to other situations, which will require further investigation. Another element to the trustworthiness of the data and conclusions

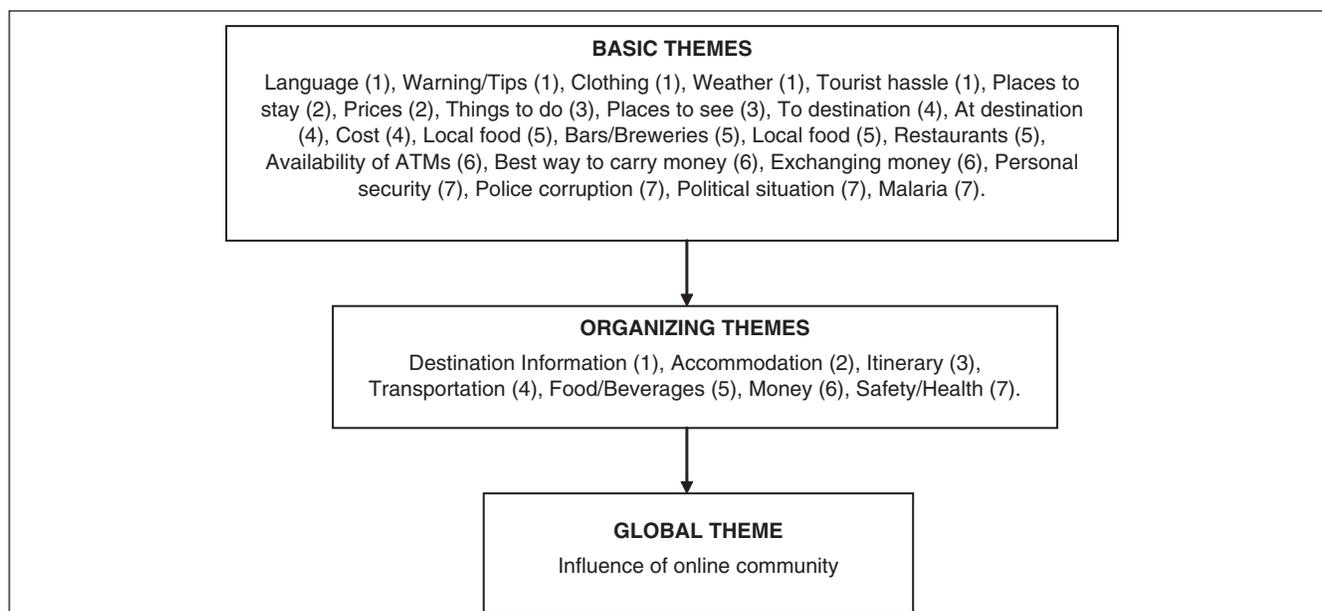


Figure 1. Themes identified in thematic networks

Note: Numbers next to the basic themes indicate which organizing theme they belong to.

presented in this study is the detail provided regarding the methods. In many previous works involving qualitative data, methods are often presented behind terms such as *coding* and *text analysis* in a “black box” type approach. Great effort was made in this study to “unpack” the methodology and have multiple researchers contribute to each step. This is standard for rigorous qualitative methodology.

Results

The analysis resulted in 29 basic themes or topic areas, 8 organizing themes, and 1 global theme. However, 1 organizing theme (i.e., living at destination) and 6 accompanying basic themes (i.e., visa issues, learning the local language, finding a job, which city to live in, what part of the city to move to, and living costs) were not included in the final analysis as they did not pertain to travel. This resulted in 23 basic themes, 7 organizing themes, and 1 global theme (Figure 1). The thematic networks are represented in Figure 2 and referred to as discussion topics in the study.

Organizing Themes

1. *Accommodations*: One of the most discussed topics in the selected country forums was related to accommodations, including places to stay and their prices.
2. *Itinerary*: Members asked for recommendation from others to modify and adjust their travel itinerary, especially members who have been to the

destination and could provide good tips related to the destination. The basic themes under this topic were places to see and things to do.

3. *Transportation*: This topic included three basic themes. The first was transportation to the destination and involved discussion of airlines and how to get to the destination. The second was transportation at the destination and was related to finding one’s way at the destination, such as how to go to the museum from the hotel. The third basic theme pertained to the cost of transportation.
4. *Food and beverage recommendations*: Tasting local dishes and drinks was one of the most discussed topics under country forums since it is an important part of travel experience. Members gave specific names of the dishes, addresses of restaurants and bar/breweries, and how to get to those places by local transportation or on foot. The basic themes under this topic were local dishes and drinks, restaurants, and bar/brewery discussions.
5. *Money*: The information found in this topic may be hard to find in destination Web sites, especially travelers to developing countries. The basic themes included in this topic were exchanging money, how to carry money (i.e., cash, travelers’ check), and the availability of ATMs.
6. *Safety and health*: Travelers to African countries were especially concerned about safety and health issues. Basic themes included safety at the

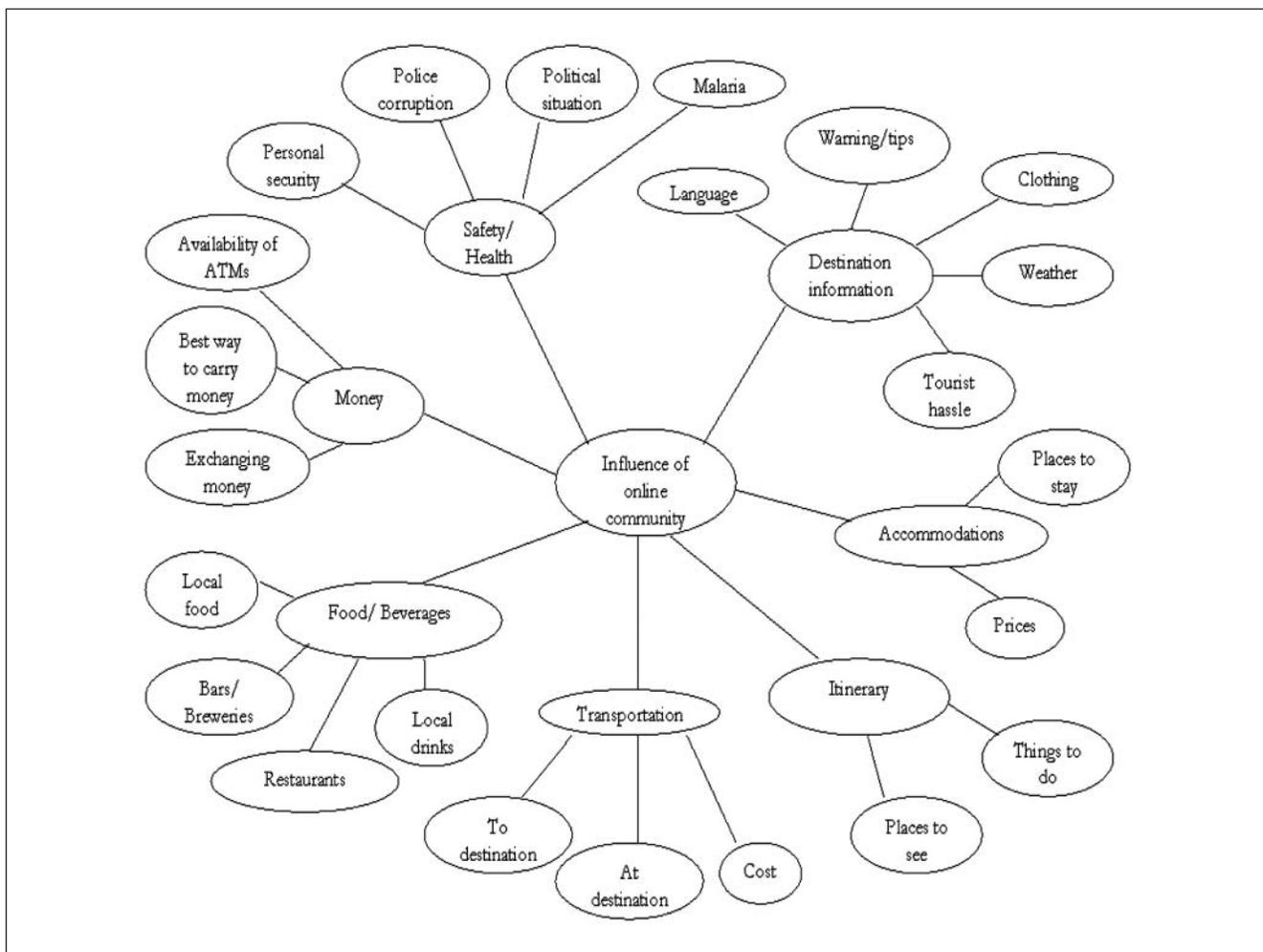


Figure 2. Thematic networks

destination, political situation at the destination, police corruption, and health issues (e.g., malaria).

7. *Destination information:* This topic was related to anything specific about the destination, such as the local language and weather. The basic themes included in this topic were weather, tourist hassle, what to wear at the destination, warning and tips about the destination, and language.

The Influence of eWOM

The results revealed that 23 threads (of the potential 74) were influential for members that included 1,699 postings and 713 contributing members. In other words, 31% of the threads were influential in members’ travel planning (Table 2).

A thread was considered noninfluential when the member who started the thread either did not post additional messages or did not mention his or her final decision in the postings. An example is provided through a thread involving

Table 2. Total Threads and Influential Threads by Discussion Topic

Discussion Topic	Total Threads	Influential Threads	% Influential Threads
Accommodations	5	2	40
Food and beverages	9	5	56
Transportation	5	1	20
Safety	9	1	3
Money	3	1	33
Destination information	32	6	19
Itinerary	11	7	64
Total	74	23	31

the OP and a resident member discussing potential restaurants. Initially the OP asked,

Where in Amsterdam or any nearby environs would one go to have an old-time Dutch meal? I’m seeking

the sort of place that the cheese makers would go to after a day at the market, preferably a smoky mom and pop place where everyone would wonder who the new guy is as soon as I walk in the door. All replies gratefully acknowledged.

In response, a resident member shared, “*Moeders* is one of the restaurants I know that makes Dutch food the way our moms make it.” The OP followed by saying, “Well, *Moeders* it is in then! Thank you both for the tip and the link; I will certainly give it a try.”

The Influence of eWOM and Information Source

In the influential threads, members were categorized by their level of experience at the destination as well. Table 3 shows the member types and their definitions.

Of the influential threads, 1,699 postings were coded and categorized according to discussion topics and member category that is shown in Table 4. Residents, experienced travelers, and unknown members posted messages mostly related to destination information; OPs posted primarily about itinerary refinements; and potential travelers posted mainly regarding safety of the destination.

The Influence of eWOM and Product Type

Of the 23 threads that showed evidence of influence, residents were influential in two threads about accommodations, four threads about food and beverages, and one thread about destination information (Table 5). Experienced travelers influenced one food and beverage thread, one transportation thread, one safety thread, one money thread, five destination information threads, and seven itinerary threads. The results indicated that residents were more influential in accommodations and food and beverage recommendations. Moreover, residents were also influential in one destination information thread. On the other hand, experienced travelers were more influential in the destination information category. In addition, experienced travelers were also influential in food and beverages, transportation, safety, money, and itinerary refinements.

An example of an influential thread involving itinerary about a potential trip to Belgium began with an OP stating,

I decided to go to Antwerp this Tuesday on a whim. Does anyone have a recommendation on a hostel in the centre? Where would be a good place with cafes where one could sit all day and do nothing? I will be going alone for the first time so would prefer somewhere “friendly” to people eating alone. What are the MUST-DOs in Antwerp? I’ll only be there for about 24 hours so 1-2 places should be sufficient. Thank you in advance :)

Table 3. Explanation of Member Types

Member Types	Definition
Original posters (OP)	Start a thread discussion
Experienced travelers	Indicate in their postings that they have been to the destination
Residents	Suggest in their messages that they live at the destination
Potential traveler	State in their postings that they want to visit the destination
Unknown members	Do not specify their experience level at the destination

In response, a resident member from Antwerp said, “I never stayed in any hostel in my hometown :) but I have heard good comments on *Den Heksenketel* in the Pelgrimsstraat. The location is very good, smack in the middle of the historical centre. Must-do’s depend entirely on your interests.” An experienced traveler followed with, “Hi Original Poster, *Location Guesthouse26* is an awesome Bed & Breakfast in the centre of Antwerp, on the historical Pelgrimstraat near the Cathedral and the Groenplaats square. Address Pelgrimsstraat 26, Antwerp Telephone 0032/497.42.83.69.” Then the same Antwerp resident added, “*Den Heksenketel*, also here *Guesthouse 26* is in the same street and gets very mixed reviews. *t Katshuis* is another very well located and cheap Bed & Coffee (very close to places where you can eat breakfast). These last 2 places are no hostel though.” Finishing the thread the OP said, “Got a place at *Den Heksenketel* so going after all!”

Discussion and Conclusions

This study had two main purposes. The first was to examine the influence residents may have on travel decisions and identify the types of travel decisions they influence. Results showed that residents have influence on travel decisions. The second aim of the study was to compare the influence residents have on travel decisions with other online community members (i.e., experienced travelers). Results revealed that experienced travelers and residents can influence different types of travel decisions within a particular travel community, the Thorn Tree Forum. Residents were found to be more influential in on-site travel decisions such as food and beverage recommendations, safety concerns at the destinations, and travel itinerary modifications, whereas experienced travelers were more influential in general travel-related issues such as accommodations, transportation, and monetary issues.

In this study, nearly one of every three threads influenced a Thorn Tree Forum member’s travel planning. Such a finding shows the “fruits of labor” of online communities. As Ridings and Gefen (2004) claim, one of the major reasons for being part of online communities is having the ability to

Table 4. Discussion Topic Distribution by Member Type

Discussion Topic	Resident	Experienced Traveler	Original Poster	Unknown Member	Potential Traveler
Accommodations	19	28	21	37	2
Food and beverage	13	116	25	15	1
Transportation	10	52	14	30	2
Safety	24	138	20	79	19
Money	0	44	5	9	0
Destination information	156	282	75	102	8
Itinerary	98	127	85	33	10
Total	320	787	245	305	42

Table 5. Thread Distribution by Discussion Topic and Influential Member Type

Discussion Topic	Resident	Experienced Traveler
Accommodations	2	0
Food and beverages	4	1
Transportation	0	1
Safety	0	1
Money	0	1
Destination information	1	5
Itinerary	0	7
Total	7	16

exchange information with others. As Kim, Lee, and Hiemstra (2004) found, online community members' travel planning and decision making were significantly affected with increased visitation to the community.

Jun, Vogt, and MacKay (2007) suggested that travel information search and product purchase differ by travel experience. Their study indicated that travel experience influences accommodations, activities, attractions, and car rental information search and purchase decisions regarding accommodations, car rentals, and flights (Jun, Vogt, and MacKay 2007). The results of this research are in congruence with the study mentioned previously in all categories except accommodations. Our results show that residents in this online community were influential in accommodation choices, rather than experienced travelers. This is likely a reflection of residents being most knowledgeable of their adjacent surroundings as Gunn and Var (2002) point out. In addition, residents were influential in making choices about food and beverages and finding out information about the destination. This study reveals that residents of a destination may indeed be a viable information source for potential travelers as Bieger and Laesser (2004) and Gursoy and Umbreit (2004) briefly allude to in their work. In addition, online communities are a useful means by which residents can contribute their "insider's perspective" of the local destination.

In regards to itinerary planning, experienced travelers in the online community studied were more influential than

residents. Wall and Mathieson (2006) claim that tourists are under great temporal constraints while traveling so they must adhere to a tight schedule and find it hard to deviate from such a schedule that is established prior to visiting and when they are on-site. In a sense, experienced travelers can be perceived as authorities on what can and should be seen while in a destination, much the way travel writers have been regarded (Robinson 2004).

This work shows that certain information sources (i.e., residents, experienced travelers, etc.) can be more influential concerning various aspects of travel (i.e., accommodations, food and beverage, transportation, etc.). What this communicates is that potential travelers may need to consult various sources of information before departing so that they have gained the most insight into the destination and make the best decisions about traveling (Fodness and Murray 1997). In a sense, one-stop shopping for information may provide limited information to today's traveler, especially when travelers' search for information includes both internal sources (e.g., previous personal experiences and knowledge accumulated through an ongoing search) and external sources (e.g., family and friends, destination-specific literature, online travel sources, and media) (Gursoy and Umbreit 2004). According to Bieger and Laesser (2004), the more complex one's trip becomes, the higher the importance of using multiple sources for planning and decision making.

Practical Implications

Information exchange between residents and potential travelers make residents an important information source where travelers can get firsthand experiences from the residents to make more informed, knowledgeable choices about their travels. In many circumstances, no one knows the destination like a resident who lives there a majority of the year. Oftentimes, they are sharing resources with tourists in their own communities (Snepenger et al. 2003). The findings of this study are important for destination marketing and show the importance of residents as information providers for travelers.

Encouraging and maintaining residents to contribute their postings in online communities will be important for Web

sites providing these forums such as lonelyplanet.com, tripadvisor.com, and igougo.com. This should involve hotels, airlines, and online travel planners sponsoring incentives and rewards for resident postings. According to Price and Starkov (2006), this rapport with key informants will be critical for any organization trying to provide appealing content on their Web sites or blogs. Schmallegger and Carson (2008) mentioned a series of incentives that benefit bloggers of hotel Web sites, one of which focuses on quantity and the other on quality of the post. Applied to residents, online travel Web sites could create a frequent-blogger incentive system that rewards residents for the number of posts made within the online community. Obviously, the more posts, the more points can be earned. Rewards may include discounted rates for air travel and free night stays at hotels of participants' choice. Another incentive could be to reward with prizes the best blog of the week (or some other period of time) among residents based on commentary and photos of the destination and influence of the post on other members of the online community (Schmallegger and Carson 2008).

Incentive or reward programs are not without shortcomings however. One issue surrounds fake or intentionally misleading postings (Litvin, Goldsmith, and Pan 2008). To combat this, live editors are needed to sort through potentially misleading travel reviews. According to Krempl (2007), Web sites such as tripadvisor.com and igougo.com are already using such live editors to monitor all content as it is submitted to specifically look for questionable postings. Ultimately, posts in online communities can provide a wealth of knowledge through stories, unique insider information, and even time- and cost-saving opportunities. Ultimately, many Web sites will have struck a balance between informative content and promotional content within these online community forums (Price and Starkov 2006).

Limitations of the Study

This study was an attempt to gain a thorough understanding of an online travel community and its members, their use of the travel information in the postings, and the influence of these postings on types of travel decisions. The influence was identified by reading the postings; however, all of the threads may have affected travel decisions even if they seem to have no influence judging from the postings.

This study looked at the influence of online travel communities from the member's perspective by analyzing postings. However, these types of online travel communities are open to anyone who has an Internet connection. Thus, the influence of eWOM in online travel communities may reach other users as well who are not members. Users are exposed to the same travel information provided in the postings, and they need not be a member to find an answer to their questions. Their questions may have been addressed in the postings already available. The influence of eWOM on types of travel

decisions may vary according to users' familiarity with the other members and the destination.

This study explored the Thorn Tree travel community, and results may be different for other travel communities. Thus, it is recommended to replicate the study for other online travel communities. While analyzing the postings, the researchers assumed that original posters did not know whether other posting members were residents of the destination or travelers who had experienced the destination unless it was indicated in their postings. However, original posters can be followers of the online community by accessing it a few times a week (e.g., reading the forums). In that case they would be familiar with other members and their level of experience at the destination, and this information could influence their travel decisions as well.

Online discussion sites are highly transient, and the data that were used in this study may not be available a year later. The postings in online travel communities usually do not go back more than a year. Also, members who were studied as part of this research may not be participating in the online discussions anymore. Thus, a researcher who is willing to replicate this study may have different data and subjects within the same online travel community. In online environments, individuals can act differently from real-world environments as their responses can be anonymous and invisible, communication is asynchronous, and authority is minimized. Such anonymity gives individuals an opportunity to separate themselves and their actions from the real world and as a result, they tend to open up more easily. However, online environments also make it easier for some individuals to be hostile or disrespectful of others (Suler 2004). Invisibility creates freedom to look at things differently online than people would offline. Moreover, individuals do not know how others react to their words (e.g., bored expression or other disapproval signs). However, they may not hesitate to show their feelings through their words or text symbols (e.g., a smiling face). Communication is asynchronous in email and message boards. Individuals can take as much time as needed to answer these types of communications. This provides the advantage of thinking about the subject more thoroughly and may lead to a more sincere response. Online communication minimizes authority since an individual's offline status may not be known. It is unknown whether an individual is the president of a company or a mechanic. In addition, an individual's gender, race, wealth, or age is unknown and everybody has equal opportunity to express himself or herself. On the other hand, the minimized presence of authority in online communication provides an opportunity for others to express themselves (Suler 2004).

Future Research

While conducting the study, researchers assumed that all the members and their postings were authentic and indicated

their true intentions, but this does not mean that actual behaviors of members would be in congruence with their postings. Thorn Tree travel community was explored in this study; however, the results could be different in other online travel communities.

It is recommended that this study be replicated in other online travel communities. However, we do encourage the continued use of thematic networks to determine if similar findings would emerge from data analysis. Since a thematic network is based on argumentation theory, it is a useful tool for analysis of online postings, especially postings that form a conversation. Also, by using thematic networks, underlying themes at different levels that are present in a text can be identified. This qualitative method has an organized way of data extraction at three different levels, which also brings richness in exploration.

Results were analyzed from the member's perspective since only members can post messages; however, anyone who accesses the Web site of the community can read these postings and might be influenced. A study that also includes all the users of the online travel community would give us a better perspective about the influence of eWOM and of member type on the types of travel decisions.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The authors declared no potential conflicts of interests with respect to the authorship and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The authors received no financial support for the research and/or authorship of this article.

References

- Anderreck, K. L., K. M. Valentine, R. C. Knopf, and C. A. Vogt (2005). "Residents' Perceptions of Community Tourism Impacts." *Annals of Tourism Research*, 32 (4): 1056-76.
- Ap, J., and J. L. Crompton (1998). "Developing and Testing a Tourism Impact Scale." *Journal of Travel Research*, 37 (2): 120-30.
- Aramberri, J. (2001). "The Host Should Get Lost: Paradigms in the Tourism Industry." *Annals of Tourism Research*, 28 (3): 738-61.
- Attride-Stirling, J. (2001). "Thematic Networks: An Analytic Tool for Qualitative Research." *Qualitative Research*, 1 (3): 385-405.
- Attride-Stirling, J. (2007). "Thematic Networks: An Analytic Tool for Qualitative Research." In A. Bryman (Ed.), *Qualitative Research 2* (Vol. 4). London: Sage, pp. 125-50.
- Bansal, H. S., and P. A. Voyer (2000). "Word-of-Mouth Processes within a Services Purchase Decision Context." *Journal of Service Research*, 3 (2): 166-77.
- Bastias-Perez, P., and T. Var (1995). "Perceived Impacts of Tourism by Residents." *Annals of Tourism Research*, 22 (1): 208-10.
- Bearden, W. O., and M. J. Etzel (1982). "Reference Group Influence on Product and Brand Purchase Decisions." *Journal of Consumer Research*, 15 (4): 473-81.
- Beliveau, A., and J. B. Garwood (2001). "The Impact of New Technologies on Information Research and Purchasing Behavior of Quebec Air Travelers." Paper presented at ENTER Conference on Information and Communications Technology in Tourism 2001, Montreal, Canada.
- Bieger, T., and C. Laesser (2004). "Information Sources for Travel Decisions: Toward a Source Process Model." *Journal of Travel Research*, 42 (4): 357-71.
- Blackwell, R. D., P. W. Miniard, and J. F. Engel (2001). *Consumer Behavior*. Orlando, FL: Harcourt College Publishers.
- Brockriede, W., and D. Ehninger (1960). "Toulmin on Argument: An Interpretation and Application." *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 46 (1): 44-53.
- Bonabeau, E. (2004). "The Perils of the Imitation Age." *Harvard Business Review*, 82 (6): 45-54.
- Bounie, D., M. Bourreau, M. Gensollen, and P. Waelbroeck (2005). "Do Online Consumer Reviews Matter? Evidence from the Video Game Industry." <http://www.sceco.univ-montp1.fr/laser/Conferences/jv200510201.pdf> (accessed February 26, 2007).
- Childers, T. L., and R. Rao (1992). "The Influence of Familial and Peer-based Reference Groups." *Journal of Consumer Research*, 19 (2): 198-212.
- Cohen, E. (1996). "Hunter-gatherer Tourism in Thailand." In *Tourism and Indigenous People*, edited by R. Butler and Th. Hinch. International Thompson Press, pp. 227-54.
- Crotts, J. (1999). "Consumer Decision Making and Prepurchase Information Search." In *Consumer Behavior in Travel and Tourism*, edited by A. Pizam. New York: Haworth Hospitality Press, pp. 149-68.
- Dellaert, B. (1999). "The Tourist as Value Creator on the Internet." In *Information and Communication Technologies in Tourism*, edited by D. S. Buhalis and W. Schertler. New York: Springer, pp. 66-76.
- Dellarocas, C. (2003). "The Digitalization of Word-of-mouth: Promise and Challenges of Online Reputation Mechanisms." *Management Science*, 49 (10): 1407-24.
- Dellarocas, C., N. F. Awad, and X. Zhang (2004). "Exploring the Value of Online Reviews to Organizations: Implications for Revenue Forecasting and Planning." Paper presented at the International Conference on Information Systems, Washington, DC.
- De Mooij, M. (2004). *Consumer Behavior and Culture*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Deutsch, M., and H. Gerard (1955). "A Study of Normative and Informational Social Influences upon Individual Judgment." *Journal of Abnormal Social Psychology*, 51 (3): 629-36.
- Evans-Pritchard, D. (1989). "How 'They' See 'Us': Native American Images of Tourists." *Annals of Tourism Research*, 16 (1): 89-105.
- Fodness, D., and B. Murray (1997). "Tourist Information Search." *Annals of Tourism Research*, 24 (3): 503-23.
- Fodness, D., and B. Murray (1998). "A Typology of Tourist Information Search Strategies." *Journal of Travel Research*, 37 (2): 108-19.
- Gretzel, U., K. Y. Yoo, and M. Purifoy (2007). *Online Travel Reviews Study: Role & Impact of Online Travel Reviews: Laboratory for*

- Intelligent Systems in Tourism, Texas A&M University. LIST 02-07-01.
- Gretzel, U., Y. Yuan, and D. R. Fesenmaier (2000). "Preparing for the New Economy: Advertising Strategies and Change in Destination Marketing Organizations." *Journal of Travel Research*, 39 (2): 136-46.
- Guernsey, L. (2000, February 3). "Suddenly, Everybody's an Expert on Everything." *The New York Times*. Section G, p. 1.
- Gunn, C. A., and T. Var (2002). *Tourism Planning*, 4th edition. New York: Routledge.
- Gursoy, D., and W. T. Umbreit (2004). "Tourist Information Search Behavior: Cross-Cultural Comparison of European Union Member States." *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 23 (1): 55-70.
- Gursoy, D., C. Jurowski, and M. Uysal (2002). "Resident Attitudes: A Structural Modeling Approach." *Annals of Tourism Research*, 29 (1): 79-105.
- Harrill, R. (2004). "Residents' Attitudes toward Tourism Development: A Literature Review with Implications for Tourism Planning." *Journal of Planning Literature*, 18 (3): 251-66.
- Henningsen, D. D., and M. L. M. Henningsen (2003). "Examining Social Influence on Information-sharing Contexts." *Small Group Research*, 34 (4): 391-412.
- Heung, V. C. S. (2003). "Internet Usage by International Travelers: Reasons and Barriers." *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, 15 (7): 370-78.
- Homans, G. (1961). *Social Behavior*. New York: Harcourt, Brace & World.
- Hsu, C. H. C., S. K. Kang, and T. Lam (2006). "Reference Group Influences among Chinese Travelers." *Journal of Travel Research*, 44 (4): 474-84.
- Jeng, J., and D. R. Fesenmaier (2002). "Conceptualizing the Travel Decision-making Hierarchy: A Review of Recent Developments." *Tourism Analysis*, 7 (1): 15-32.
- Jennings, G., and N. Nickerson, Eds. (2006). *Quality Tourism Experiences*. Burlington, MA: Butterworth-Heinemann.
- Jun, S., C. A. Vogt, and K. J. MacKay (2007). "Relationships between Travel Information Search and Travel Product Purchase in Pretrip Contexts." *Journal of Travel Research*, 45 (3): 266-74.
- Kim, W. G., C. Lee, and S. J. Hiemstra (2004). "Effects of an Online Virtual Community on Customer Loyalty and Travel Product Purchases." *Tourism Management*, 25 (3): 343-55.
- King, B., A. Pizam, and A. Milman (1993). "Social Impacts of Tourism Host Perceptions." *Annals of Tourism Research*, 20 (4): 650-65.
- Krempf, S. (2007). "Travel 2.0: Die Tourism-usbranche fliegt auf neue Webtechniken." <http://www.heise.de/newsticker/meldung/86448/from/rss09> (accessed January 30, 2009).
- Lang, T. C. (2000). "The Effect of the Internet on Travel Consumer Purchasing Behaviour and Implications for Travel Agencies." *Journal of Vacationing Marketing*, 6 (4): 368-85.
- Lankford, S., and D. Howard (1994). "Developing a Tourism Impact Attitude Scale." *Annals of Tourism Research*, 21 (1): 121-39.
- Lawson, R. W., J. Williams, T. Young, and J. Cossens (1998). "A Comparison of Residents' Attitudes towards Tourism in 10 New Zealand Destinations." *Tourism Management*, 19 (3): 247-56.
- Laxson, J. (1991). "How 'We' See 'Them': Tourism and Native Americans." *Annals of Tourism Research*, 18 (3): 365-91.
- Litvin, S. W., R. E. Goldsmith, and B. Pan (2008). "Electronic Word-of-mouth in Hospitality and Tourism Management." *Tourism Management*, 29 (3): 458-68.
- Lovelock, H., and C. Wright (1999). *Principles of Services Marketing and Management*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Mathieson, A., and G. Wall (1982). *Tourism: Economic, Physical and Social Impacts*. London: Longman.
- McGehee, N. G., and K. L. Andereck (2004). "Factors Predicting Rural Residents' Support of Tourism." *Journal of Travel Research*, 43 (2): 131-40.
- Mehta, S. C., A. K. Lalwani, and L. Ping (2001). "Reference Group Influence and Perceived Risk in Services among Working Women in Singapore: A Replication and Extension." *Journal of International Consumer Marketing*, 14 (1): 43-65.
- Merriam, S. (2002). *Qualitative Research in Practice: Examples for Discussion and Analysis*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Nelson, P. (1970). "Information and Consumer Behavior." *Journal of Political Economy*, 78 (2): 311-29.
- Pan, B., T. MacLaurin, and J. Crofts (2007). "Travel Blogs and the Implications for Destination Marketing." *Journal of Travel Research*, 46 (1): 35-45.
- Park, W. C., and P. V. Lessig (1977). "Students and Housewives: Differences in Susceptibility to Reference Group Influence." *Journal of Consumer Research*, 4 (2): 102-10.
- Perdue, R. R., P. T. Long, and L. Allen (1990). "Resident Support for Tourism Development." *Annals of Tourism Research*, 17 (4): 586-99.
- Perry, M., and B. C. Hamm (1969). "Canonical Analysis of Relations between Socioeconomic Risk and Personal Influence in Purchase Decisions." *Journal of Marketing Research*, 6 (3): 351-405.
- Price, J., and M. Starkov (2006). "Building a Blog Strategy in Hospitality: Grow Customer Relationships and Direct Online Revenue." <http://www.hospitalitynet.org/news/4026867.html> (accessed January 30, 2009).
- Punj, G. N., and R. Stealin (1983). "A Model of Consumer Information Search Behavior for New Automobiles." *Journal of Consumer Research*, 9 (March): 366-80.
- Reed, M. G. (1997). "Power Relations and Community-based Tourism Planning." *Annals of Tourism Research*, 24 (3): 566-91.
- Ricci, F., and R. T. A. Wietsma (2006). "Product Reviews in Travel Decision Making." Paper presented at the Information and Communication Technologies in Tourism 2006, Lausanne, Switzerland.
- Ridings, C. M., and D. Gefen (2004). "Virtual Community Attraction: Why People Hang Out Online." *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 10 (1): article 4.
- Ridings, C. M., D. Gefen, and B. Arinze (2002). "Some Antecedents and Effects of Trust in Virtual Communities." *Journal of Strategic Information Systems*, 11 (3/4): 271-95.
- Ritchie, J. R. B. (1993). "Consensus Policy Formulation in Tourism: Measuring Resident Views via Survey Research." *Tourism Management*, 9 (3): 199-212.
- Robinson, M. (2004). "Narratives of Being Elsewhere: Tourism and Travel Writing." In *A Companion to Tourism*, edited

- by A. Lew, C. M. Hall, and A. Williams. Oxford, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, pp. 303-15.
- Schmallegger, D., and D. Carson (2008). "Blogs in Tourism: Changing Approaches to Information Exchange." *Journal of Vacation Marketing*, 14 (2): 99-110.
- Senecal, S., and J. Nantel (2004). "The Influence of Online Product Recommendations on Consumers' Online Choices." *Journal of Retailing*, 80 (2): 159-69.
- Sherlock, K. (2001). "Revisiting the Concept of Hosts and Guests." *Tourist Studies*, 1 (3): 271-95.
- Sirakaya, E., V. Teye, and S. Sonmez (2002). "Understanding Residents Support for Tourism Development in the Central Region of Ghana." *Journal of Travel Research*, 41 (1): 57-67.
- Smith, V., Ed. (1977). *Hosts and Guests: The Anthropology of Tourism*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Snaith, T., and A. Haley (1999). "Residents' Opinions of Tourism Development in the Historic City of York, England." *Tourism Management*, 20 (5): 595-603.
- Snepenger, D. J., L. Murphy, R. O'Connell, and E. Gregg (2003). "Tourists and Residents Use of a Shopping Space." *Annals of Tourism Research*, 30 (3): 567-80.
- Stepchenkova, S., J. E. Mills, and H. Jiang (2007). "Virtual Travel Communities: Self-reported Experiences and Satisfaction." Paper presented at the Information and communication technologies in tourism 2007, Lausanne, Switzerland.
- Suler, J. (2004). "The Online Disinhibition Effect." <http://www.rider.edu/~suler/psyber/disinhibit.html> (accessed February 15, 2006).
- Tomljenovic, R., and B. Faulkner (2000). "Tourism and Older Residents in a Sunbelt Resort." *Annals of Tourism Research*, 27 (1): 93-114.
- Tosun, C. (2000). "Limits to Community Participation in the Tourism Development Process in Developing Countries." *Tourism Management*, 21 (6): 613-33.
- Toulmin, S. (1958). *The Uses of Argument*. Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press.
- van Rees, M. A. (2007). "Discourse Analysis and Argumentation Theory: The Case of Television Talk." *Journal of Pragmatics*, 39 (8): 1454-63.
- Wall, G., and A. Mathieson (2006). *Tourism: Change, Impacts and Opportunities*. Harlow, UK: Pearson.
- Wang, Y., and D. R. Fesenmaier (2003). "Assessing Motivation of Contribution in Online Communities: An Empirical Investigation of an Online Travel Community." *Electronic Markets*, 13 (1): 33-45.
- Wearing, S., and B. Wearing (2001). "Conceptualizing the Selves of Tourism." *Leisure Studies*, 20 (2): 143-59.
- Wilkie, W. L., and P. R. Dickson (1985). *Shopping for Appliances: Consumers' Strategies and Patterns of Information Search*. Cambridge, MA: Marketing Science Institute.
- Wu, J., and Y. Chang (2005). "Towards Understanding Members' Interactivity, Trust, and Flow in Online Travel Community." *Industrial Management & Data Systems*, 105 (7): 937-54.
- Yoo, K. H., and U. Gretzel (2008). "Use and Impact of Online Travel Reviews." In *Information and Communication Technologies in Tourism 2008*, edited by P. O'Connor, W. Hopken, and U. Gretzel. Vienna, Austria: Springer, pp. 35-46.

Irem Arsal is an assistant professor at MODUL University Vienna in the Department of Tourism and Hospitality Management. Her research interests include Web 2.0, user-generated content, and decision-making process of travelers, online communities, and online travel information search.

Kyle M. Woosnam is an assistant professor at Texas A&M University in the Department of Recreation, Park & Tourism Sciences. His research interests include examining the relationships between residents and tourists, social impacts of tourism, and community tourism development.

Elizabeth D. Baldwin joined the Parks and Protected Areas faculty in the Parks, Recreation, and Tourism Management Department at Clemson University in 2006. She is interested in qualitative research methodology to explore motivations and in-depth meanings not apparent with other methods. She investigates this specifically related to parks and protected area management.

Sheila J. Backman is a professor in the Parks, Recreation, and Tourism Management Department at Clemson University. Her main research interests include incentive travel, consumer behavior and judgments, and recreation service loyalty.