Abstract

A Google search in early October 2009 for ‘travel photo’ returned over 950 million web pages, indicating a prevalence of online travel pictures. This conceptual paper examines sharing travel pictures on the Web as a form of online destination recommendations. An extended Theory of Planned Behaviour, decomposing subjective norm into six sub-norms, helps explain how these sub-norms relate to an online behaviour, posting pictures on the Web. The paper closes with a series of propositions using these sub-norms as a future research agenda.

Keywords: Theory of Planned Behaviour, norms, user-generated content, travel photograph, word of mouth
Pictures on the Web: Normative Photo Sharing with Friends and Travellers

Introduction

Online travel images create interest in destinations (Syed-Ahmad, Hashim et al., 2009; Tussyadiah and Fesenmaier, 2009). Travel photograph posting is increasing as travellers share opinions and experiences on websites such as Facebook, Flickr and TripAdvisor. While studies of this user-generated content (UGC) revolve around recommendations through text reviews, such as on TripAdvisor (Gretzel and Yoo, 2008; Vermeulen and Seegers, 2009; Ye, Law and Gu, 2009), few examine photographs as a travel recommendation. In addition, although tourism studies include travel photographs (Dewar, Li and Davis, 2007; Garrod, 2009; MacKay and Couldwell, 2004), none examine photographs as a means of giving travel opinions. Furthermore, although tourists take photographs to share with others (Urry, 1990), few if any studies examine sharing travel photographs – offline and online.

Sharing Travel Photos Online

With UGC, Internet users create, edit, share and view online information such as text, pictures, video or audio for recommendations, social networking and self expression (Cormode and Krishnamurthy, 2008; Daugherty, Eastin and Bright, 2008; Krishnamurthy and Dou, 2008). Travel recommendations typically appear through sites such as TripAdvisor, social communication on social network sites such as Facebook and MySpace, and self-expressions appear through photo and video postings on sites such as Flickr and YouTube.

UGC on destinations and travel services resembles word of mouth (WOM). This online interaction among individuals regarding a product or organisation, without any financial incentives (Litvin, Goldsmith and Pan, 2008), could lead to destination visits (Puczko, Ratz and Smith, 2007). When the Internet mediates this interaction, WOM becomes word of Web (WOW) (Weinberg and Davis, 2005). Traditionally WOM involves the spoken word, while WOW refers to text such as TripAdvisor reviews. WOW reaches beyond family and friends, to include visitors to UGC sites who choose the website and delivery time (Sun et al., 2006).

Regardless of age, individuals remember travel photos equally well (Smith and MacKay, 2001), suggesting that pictures on the Web (POW) could also influence intention to visit a destination. Half of tourists who viewed UGC looked at photos (Yoo et al., 2009). Travel visuals help viewers imagine, intend, and plan destination visits (Syed-Ahmad, Hashim et al., 2009; Tussyadiah and Fesenmaier, 2009). Travel POW appear on UGC sites such as Facebook and TripAdvisor as well as Flickr (Cantoni et al., 2009; Syed-Ahmad, Hashim et al., 2009). In June 2009, a search on Flickr for the word ‘travel’ returned over nine million photos and ‘holiday’ returned nearly five million photos, suggesting abundant travel POW. Understanding reasons for travel photo sharing could assist destination marketing organisations strategise to increase destination recommendations as individuals prefer recommendations from others than formal sources (Cheong and Morrison, 2008). One theory to help explain why people post POW and its influence on travellers is the Theory of Planned Behaviour.
Theory of Planned Behaviour

The Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) helps predict intentions and behaviours (Armitage and Conner, 2001; Klobas and Clyde, 2000; Lam and Hsu, 2006; Pavlou and Fygenson, 2006). Figure 1 shows TPB's three components – attitude towards a behaviour, subjective norm and perceived behavioural control – as antecedents of the intention to perform a behaviour, which then predicts behaviour (Ajzen, 1991). Attitude – thoughts and feelings towards performing a behaviour – predicts intentions. Perceived behavioural control reflects the difficulty to perform a behaviour. A meta-analysis of 185 TPB studies showed perceived behavioural control predicted intention and behaviour in many fields (Armitage and Conner, 2001); it is the only TPB component to influence behaviour indirectly through intention or directly as shown with dotted line in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Theory of Planned Behaviour (Ajzen, 1991)

Subjective norm, also known as injunctive norm, is how important people think one should behave (Ajzen, 1991). Compared to attitude and perceived behavioural control, subjective norm was the best predictor of Taiwanese travellers’ intentions to visit Hong Kong (Lam and Hsu, 2006), but is usually the least influential of the three predictors of intention (Armitage and Conner, 2001). Aside from injunctive norm, researchers argue that another norm, descriptive norm or what behaviourally relevant people do, can also predict intentions (Terry and Hogg, 1996). While Ajzen alluded to the importance of descriptive norm, TPB does not include a separate descriptive norm; descriptive norm is a component of subjective norm (Ajzen, 2002). In addition, TPB’s focus on only one type of group, important others, may have a limited scope in explaining behaviours such as travel POW posting.

Conceptual Development

Introduced in 1955, two norms that govern actions are injunctive and descriptive norms, respectively normative and informative influence (Deutsch and Gerard, 1955). Injunctive norms revolve around individuals’ thoughts regarding others’ expectation or approval of a behaviour (Ajzen, 1991). Descriptive norms relate to the popularity or prevalence of an action. Both norms can predict intentions to conduct a behaviour (Rivis and Sheeran, 2003; Terry and Hogg, 1996).
Three normative groups govern behaviours. Important people are family and friends, behaviourally relevant groups relate directly to the conducted behaviour, and finally, societal groups refer to country and culture. Researchers argue that injunctive and descriptive norms apply to behaviourally relevant others as well as important others (Christensen et al., 2004; Fekadu and Kraft, 2002; Lee, 2007). For example, students had both norms when their behaviour related to university allegiance. Their behaviour matched what other students, behaviourally relevant others, expected and did (Christensen et al., 2004). Societal norms are the opinions and popularity of behaviours within a culture or country (Park and Smith, 2007). Combined, the two types of norms and three groups yield six different sub-norms in Table 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Injunctive Norm</th>
<th>Descriptive Norm</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Important people</td>
<td>Important Injunctive Norm (IIN)</td>
<td>Important Descriptive Norm (IDN)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Behaviourally Relevant Group</td>
<td>Group Injunctive Norm (GIN)</td>
<td>Group Descriptive Norm (GDN)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Society</td>
<td>Societal Injunctive Norm (SIN)</td>
<td>Societal Descriptive Norm (SDN)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1. Normative Components

Combinations of these six sub-norms help govern behaviours. With organ donation for instance, important others’ opinions (IIN) differ from societal injunctive norms (SIN) due to cultural and religious beliefs (Park and Smith, 2007). Similarly, for posting content in a UGC community such as MySpace, differing norms could govern a teenager’s decisions. Important others such as parents might not approve of involvement in MySpace (IIN) nor have an account, reflecting non-involvement with MySpace (IDN). Yet MySpace friends, a behaviourally relevant group, would have other expectations (GIN) and behaviours (GDN). In addition, society has expectations (SIN) and behaviours (SDN) regarding MySpace use, transmitted through media such as news, advertisements, and television.

Posting Pictures on the Web

The six sub-norms should relate to POW in UGC communities. While only members can post content, posted UGC can be for friends, members, or non-members. For instance, on TripAdvisor, reviews are open postings for public sharing. Yet for social network sites and Flickr, users determine the level of openness, with semi-open settings common in Facebook for selected friends, while Flickr users could decide to share photos with anyone (Boyd and Ellison, 2007; Cox, Clough and Marlow, 2008).

The influence of norms should differ for semi-open and open postings. Compared to open postings, individuals posting on semi-open social networking communities may have higher identification with behaviourally relevant UGC group as friendship is the main reason for using social network sites (Boyd, 2006; Ellison, Steinfield and Lampe, 2007). Furthermore, for semi-open communities, important others and relevant groups could overlap as friends could be important and behaviourally relevant.

As posting POW is a public behaviour, amongst friends or wider audiences, this posting could stem from both injunctive and descriptive norms (Lapinski and Rimal, 2005). The six perceived sub-norms could govern intentions to post travel POW for a selected destination as in Table 2.
Table 2: Sub-Norms for Destination A POW Posting Intentions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Injunctive norm</th>
<th>Descriptive norm</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Important people (IIN)</td>
<td>Relevant group (GIN)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approval of previous travel POW postings</td>
<td>Approval of posting travel POW</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expectation to post travel POW</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Injunctive norms for important people (IIN) and behaviourally relevant groups (GIN) come from three aspects. First, approval of previous travel POW postings could affect posting intentions. For example, on Flickr there is a significant relationship between photo popularity and number of postings (Cox, Clough and Marlow, 2008). Second is the expectation to post travel POW where perceptions of Facebook friends’ thoughts were posting barriers (Syed-Ahmad, Ismail et al., 2009). The final aspect is destination approval, possibly creating low intentions to post travel POW on destinations that others do not approve. For societal injunctive norm (SIN) covering acceptable behaviours within a society (Park and Smith, 2007), public opinions regarding posting travel POW and the destination should govern travel POW posting intentions.

Descriptive norms depend on the prevalence of a behaviour. For destination A’s POW posting intentions, the popularity of posting POW and the popularity of the destination among important others (IDN), relevant group (GDN) and society (SDN) should influence travel POW posting behaviour. For example, seeing Facebook friends’ travel photos, or knowing friends post travel photos, could affect POW postings (Syed-Ahmad, Hashim et al., 2009).

Extended TPB and Pictures on the Web

The six sub-norms will yield a more complete reflection of norms than just TPB’s subjective norm (IIN). Adding descriptive norm for important others, as well as both types of norms for the group and society, in Figure 2, should increase the normative predictive power in the TPB. Therefore, this paper suggests these propositions:

- P1a: IDN relates positively to travel POW posting intention
- P1b: GIN relates positively to travel POW posting intention
- P1c: GDN relates positively to travel POW posting intention
- P1d: SIN relates positively to travel POW posting intention
- P1e: SDN relates positively to travel POW posting intention
Due to users’ privacy settings on UGC sites, two types of POW posting intentions appear – open and semi-open – affecting the normative components. Both injunctive and descriptive norms should be higher for semi-open than open postings for all sub-norms except societal. For instance, compared to strangers, injunctive norm of what friends think, IIN and GIN, should carry more weight (Ajzen, 1991). In addition, what is popular among friends, IDN and GDN, could influence intention (Rivis and Sheeran, 2003), possibly more than strangers. However, when the items are for public display, societal norms, SIN and SDN, should govern behaviour more than with photos just for friends. Therefore,

P2a: IIN relates more to semi-open than open travel POW posting intention
P2b: IDN relates more to semi-open than open travel POW posting intention
P2c: GIN relates more to semi-open than open travel POW posting intention
P2d: GDN relates more to semi-open than open travel POW posting intention
P2e: SIN relates more to open than semi-open travel POW posting intention
P2f: SDN relates more to open than semi-open POW travel posting intentions

Directions for future research

A quantitative study could test the extended TPB model for explanatory power of the six sub-norms for travel POW posting intentions. Testing of the model should also commence for other behaviours. Possibly, behaviours with semi-open environment such as a classroom have the same normative combinations similar to semi-open postings in comparison to an open environment such as a restaurant.

Another future research avenue is photograph sharing as tourism and photograph studies typically focus on the photographs. Within online photo sharing, studies could focus on posters’ demographics and the types of travel photos posted on UGC. Understanding posters and shared travel photos could assist destination marketing organisations promote destinations to domestic and groups of international travellers as shared photos could indicate preferences by locals and tourists from different parts of the world.
References


