Attitudes towards Travel Blogs and its effect over tour related decisions

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Abstract:

As the digital world becomes highly eminent with the preference of the generation today, it is evident that travelers are persuaded by what bloggers post on their webpage. Past research focused on blogs and bloggers themselves rarely if at all focusing on the reader's attitudes and practices. The dearth of research on determining the attitudes toward travel blogs necessitates the conduct of this research. This paper investigated the attitudes of third year- College of Education students regarding travel blogs and its effect over tour-related decisions. Moreover, this study made use of a researcher-made questionnaire which was administered to 112 respondents. Results revealed that respondents have a dependent and relying attitude towards travel blogs they read. In terms of the influence of travel blogs to respondents' decisions on travel and destination, it was also found that there are multi-faceted factors that influence a traveller's decision to travel, as well as multifaceted preferences and dispositions of travellers that read travel blogs. However, a Spearman-Rho test reveals that there is a negative and weak correlation between travel blogs and travel decisions. This implies that travel blogs do not influence the respondent's decisions to travel.

I.   Introduction

In today's digital world, a flood of information can practically and conveniently be retrieved through the cyberspace's repository. With just a few clicks, the information goes to the readers. One has to simply type in a phrase or keyword then different webpages containing information about that phrase or keyword will appear.

One of the types of webpages containing information is blogs. Byrd (2016) defines a blog to be a frequently updated personal journal or diary where one can express him/herself through a reflection of one's thoughts and passions. Blog is a short form for the word weblog and the two words are used interchangeably. People all over the world share different passions, different interests, different tastes, and different preferences. These blogs are a reflectionand an extension of who they are in the real world. Bloggers and readers alike sharing a virtual connection through the topics bloggers post and the same topics that their readers search for. Blogs have a broad range of themes from food, fashion, and travel. As Quora website and Baumer, E. Sueyoshi, M & Tomlinson, B (2008) claim, there is no definite number of travel blogs that exists since it depends on the travel category. Some blogs are part of a bigger lifestyle blog network. Also, there is a large discrepancy between the statistics and a misconception that readers are bloggers themselves. Living in a digital age, globalization is taking place so it is inevitable that avid travelers share their travel experiences online. This sharing of travel experiences indirectly promotes the tourism of local and international destinations by stimulating a prospective traveller's wanderlust.

The thriving tourism industry in the Philippines has received considerable attention both locally and internationally. According to the website of Philippine Statistics Authority, the Philippines attracted a total of 4,272,811 visitors in 2012 which rose to 4,681,307 in 2013 and to 4,833,368 in 2014. Travel bloggers who have been to the Philippines entice tourists with pictures of stunning and breathtaking views of the Philippines and provide them with accurate and factual reviews and descriptions of each tourist spot.

General View of Reader's Perception on Travel Blogs

Bosangit,   Dulnuan,   & Mena, (2009) found out that the post-consumption behavior of tourists can better be observed and inferred when tourists recreate their travel experiences and what they do behind the blogging. Dohmen (2013) found out in his study that for the readers, online sources including travel blogs are preferred in terms of intention to use and experience as opposed to offline sources. Online sources including travel blogs are preferred by its readers on four out of five stages of traveling which include: dreaming, planning, booking, experience and sharing. The study showedthat in all five stages, except for booking that online sources including blogs are preferred by the readers. Moreover, Buted (2014) concluded in his study that social media including blogs are used frequently by individuals and the hospitality industry due to its

affordability and efficiency in information dissemination. However, the main problem is that a lack of proper presentation of customer's thoughts and expressions results to bad impressions and unfair criticisms.

II.   Review of Related Literature

Banyai & Glover (2011) concluded that communication channels, as well as the consumption and promotion of tourist destinations, had been influenced by the emerging trend of online diaries, or blogs. Furthermore, they stated that a travel blog being a substantial source of destination marketing information is an area of research that has been undervalued and overlooked. However the gap indicated in this study has been limited to the travel blog itself. As Baumer, Sueyoshi & Tomlinson (2008) claimed that blogging is not an individual undertaking and that although there is an increasing number of blog readers, this area is still yet to be unveiled.

Bosangit, McCabe, & Hibbert (2009) noticed that many travel blogs are rich narratives that have remarkable potential into leading further research on tourism consumptions and at the same time invoking tourism marketing management. However, it is insufficient to claim that travel blogs themselves are rich narratives without including its readers who are consumers of a travel blog's content. As Baumer, Sueyoshi, & Tomlinson (2008) claims that the reader's active interpretation of and interaction with the blog is where its meaning truly exists, not solely from the blogger, the blog, or the readers themselves. Hence, it is imperative to see the perception of a travel blog's content by its readers and whether, for the readers their objectives and expectations are met. Hookway (2008) posited some strategies for using blogs in social research that a prominent feature of blogs is their diverse, and sometimes, complex visual designs and layouts. Blogs are simultaneously textual and visual (Scheidt and Wright,2004). Blogs stimulate both textual expression and especially visual expression through the use of typeface, selection of images, template selection, titles, sidebars, icons, design, and color scheme. However, this definition fell short of identifying the common trend in travel blogging and how they are integrated and interpreted by the reader. Since, when travel bloggers document their travel experiences by means of travel blogs, they write for an audience which is the prospective travelers.

As Baumer, Sueyoshi, & Tomlinson (2008) believe that readers feel that they are a part of travel blogs when they read; moreover, they emphasized that reader is not a passive recipient of text but active participant especially when the readers try to interpret the text. It is interesting to note that this paper responds to the belief of Baumer, Sueyoshi, and Tomlinson.

III. Theoretical Framework

This paper is guided by Rosenblatt's Reader-Response Theory (RRT). This theory, as defined by the website of Poetry Foundation (2016) focuses on the reader or audience reaction to a particular text, perhaps more than the text itself. It gives emphasis on the role of the reader in actively constructing
meanings of texts rather than passively consuming them. Moreover, reader-response criticism argues that a text has no meaning unless a reader experiences or rather reads them.

Moore (2016) explains two types of reading according to Rosenblatt's Reader-Response Theory. Efferent reading is defined as reading to "take away" particular bits of information. Here, the reader is not interested in the rhythms of the language or the prose style but is focused on obtaining a piece of information. Rosenblatt states, "the reader's attention is primarily focused on what will remain as a residue after the reading. Efferent reading is done to glean facts, figures, and other forms of factual information. Reading materials such as manuals, textbooks, cooking recipes, and news articles fall under efferent reading.

Aesthetic reading is defined as reading to explore the work and oneself. Here, readers are engaged in the experience of reading, itself. Rosenblatt states that aesthetic reading involves the attention of the reader towards what he is living through during his interaction with a particular text. This type of reading becomes personal and subjective.

Having said this,this study hopes to provide relevant information as to how readers of travel blogs connect with the text, specifically travel blogs; efferently and aesthetically. Travel blogs are considered informative texts. They provide useful facts about a certain destination- this is efferent stance. Through those facts, when the readers of a travel blog seemingly are encouraged to visit the destination, and that they live through during their relationship with that text-this is aesthetic reading. These two when taken together would be a springboard to research on what readers really do with these facts presented by a travel blog and how these facts affect readers when pushing through with their travel decisions.

IV. Research Questions
This study investigated the attitudes of college students regarding travel blogs and its effect over tour-related decisions, specifically, the following questions were addressed:

1) What are the attitudes of college students regarding travel blogs?
2) Do travel blogs influence students' decisions on travel and destination?

V. Methodology

This study employed a quantitative approach using a researcher-made questionnaire which was administered to 112 tertiary level students. A Spearman-Rho test was conducted to compare the means of two test items and to show the correlation between travel blogs and travel decisions.

VII. Results and Discussion

Based on the findings, the respondents have positive attitudes regarding travel blogs. This implies that travel blogs are useful regardless of their habits. They are useful in the sense that that travel blogs were able to meet and to present the reader's expectations, that is they provide relevant and appropriate information about a place they intend to visit. Travel blogs provide comprehensive information about a place a reader wants to visit. Travel blogs are a useful tool in providing the readers a glimpse of the place they want to visit. It seems that readers have a dependent and relying attitude towards travel blogs they read. This means that the respondents seem to consider the information from travel blogs as important, reliable, and complete.

In terms of the influence of the travel blogs on the students' decision to travel and destination, a Spearman's rank-order correlation was run to determine the relationship between questions on attitude of readers over travel blogs and the influence of such blogs over travel decisions. It was found out that there is a negative correlation between travel blogs and travel decisions (r_s = -.085, p = .715). Moreover, it was found out that readers have multi-faceted views in reading travel blogs. For example, some may subscribe to a particular blogger while others may simply be referring to travel blogs by destination. Also, some may feel that they have active participation and role as readers to travel blogs they read and travel bloggers they subscribe to. Some see what makes a destination unique while some contrast it to previous destinations they have visited. Moreover, some may consider themselves as either a novice or experienced traveller. Though multi-faceted, it seems that readers are really absorbed into travelling itself when they read travel blogs. It can be noted that these two when taken together showed that travel blogs do not necessarily affect readers' travel decisions. This negative and weak correlation may be attributed to the fact that travellers may be influenced by different factors in planning their travel. The travel blogger and the reader may have differences in budget allocation, travel preferences and interests, and even itinerary. The reader may just simply be checking out a travel blog in order to help them decide where to go, what to do, and how to carry out their travel decisions in the planning stage. Even, the reader may not have clear intentions for travelling due to lack in budget, lack in travel motivations, lack in time and resources, and the like. The reader may also be influenced by other travel blogs and other sources of travel information (e.g. advertisements, brochures, word of mouth, and the like). Though this is only one aspect of travel blogs and travel decisions, further research is called for in determining whether there is a significant relationship between reading travel blogs and intention to visit (a destination) and to find out really the

deciding factor for a person to travel. Herratt (2010) stated that media, having various forms are used for a variety of purposes including knowledge absorption, leisure purposes, in fulfillment of a duty and as a form of escapism. Truly, the internet now is a vast and comprehensive source of information. The use of the internet has been an indispensable tool for the retrieval of information. Travel blogs are no exception to this type of information that everyone can access via the internet. Davydova (2012) revealed that travel blogs can all act as motivators, provide noteworthy information, and lastly, a way to give feedback. These are the several crucial and reliable roles a travel blog plays in planning a travel. A blogger, being aware of such roles, can make travel blogs more accessible, convenient, and make use of it to its fullest potential.

VI. Conclusion

In this study, it was found out that the reader has an inseparable role in the blogs that they read. In the efferent stance, a travel blog, having these given roles to the reader show that a travel blog is a reliable source of information in travelling. The reader of a travel blog, having a purpose set in mind for browsing a travel blog, and the travel blog itself providing these roles set the standard of what a blog can give to the reader and what a reader wants to take away from the blog. Since, when planning a travel, one has to rely on previous experience so in efferent reading, a reader presumably, not having been to that particular destination would rely on real-life reviews, experiences, and insights of people who have been to that place and use that information to guide them when pushing through with their travel. The reader, having an inseparable relationship to the blogger and the blog itself is further proven by Magasic (2014) when he stated that some of the ways travel blogging can affect the act of travelling itself include: The traveler steps out of his/her current travel experience and thus, reverting to their detached narratorial role and intervening their travel experience as the blogger takes their online audience into their consciousness whenever they travel. In the aesthetic stance, it shows that what connects a blogger to its readers is the passion for travelling itself regardless of reader's multi-faceted views and dispositions when reading. The blogger, who is enthusiastic on travel and documenting it as a way of revisiting his travel experience as vivid as when he/she first set foot in the place and as a way to delve further in his/her fresh insights, and reflection while traveling. In turn, for the reader, he/she walks through with the blogger as the travel narrative unfolds and perhaps imagining in their own seats what the blogger has seen and been through and wondering if it will be the same for them. Though not all readers subscribe to a particular blogger as what this study finds, a travel blog in itself may provide substantial narratives to the travel planning phase of the tourist.

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