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## What motivates consumers to write online travel reviews?

### Abstract

The Web provides a fertile ground for word-of-mouth communication and more and more consumers write about and share product-related experiences online. Given the experiential nature of tourism, such first-hand knowledge communicated by other travelers is especially useful for travel decision making. However, very little is known about what motivates consumers to write online travel reviews. A Web-based survey using an online consumer panel was conducted to investigate consumers' motivations to write online travel reviews. Measurement scales to gauge the motivations to contribute online travel reviews were developed and tested. The results indicate that online travel review writers are mostly motivated by helping a travel service provider, concerns for other consumers, and needs for enjoyment/positive self-enhancement. Venting negative feelings through postings is clearly not seen as an important motive. Motivational differences were found for gender and income level. Implications of the findings for online travel communities and tourism marketers are discussed.

### Keywords

motivates, consumers, write, online, travel, reviews

### Disciplines

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## WHAT MOTIVATES CONSUMERS TO WRITE ONLINE TRAVEL REVIEWS?

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The Web provides a fertile ground for word-of-mouth communication and more and more consumers write about and share product-related experiences online. Given the experiential nature of tourism, such first-hand knowledge communicated by other travelers is especially useful for travel decision making. However, very little is known about what motivates consumers to write online travel reviews. A Web-based survey using an online consumer panel was conducted to investigate consumers' motivations to write online travel reviews. Measurement scales to gauge the motivations to contribute online travel reviews were developed and tested. The results indicate that online travel review writers are mostly motivated by helping a travel service provider, concerns for other consumers, and needs for enjoyment/positive self-enhancement. Venting negative feelings through postings is clearly not seen as an important motive. Motivational differences were found for gender and income level. Implications of the findings for online travel communities and tourism marketers are discussed.

Key words: Consumer-generated content; Travel reviews; Virtual community;  
Motivations to provide content

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### Introduction

The advent of the Internet has brought about a word-of-mouth revolution. Through the Internet, individuals can make their thoughts and opinions easily accessible to the global community of Internet users (Dellarocas, 2003), and millions of online users actually engage in mass-mediated exchange of information and opinions every day (Thorson & Rodgers, 2006). According to eMar-

keter (2007a), about 75.2 million online users read or otherwise consume user-generated contents today in the US, and the number is expected to grow to 101 million by 2011. As more people engage with electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM), the number of people who create online content is also expected to rise; however, users currently outnumber creators of consumer-generated content. The Pew Internet & American Life Project (2006a) reports that 35% of US Internet users have created

content and posted it online. The estimated number of online content creators today is about 70 million, according to eMarketer (2007a).

Searching for travel-related information is one of the most popular online activities (Pew Internet & American Life Project, 2006b) and Forrester Research (2006) estimated current online travel spending as \$73 billion dollars, which represents 35% of total online spending. Importantly, Compete, Inc. (2006) found that nearly 50% of travel purchasers visited a message board, forum, or online community for their online travel purchasing and one in three of these buyers said that consumer reviews helped with their purchase decision. Further, among those buyers, 25% said they also posted a review on a consumer review site after making their purchase. Similarly, eMarketer (2007b) reports that among travelers who used the Web to plan or book a hotel stay and consulted peer reviews, 25% of infrequent leisure travelers and 33% of frequent travelers changed their hotel stays based on the reviews they read. Clearly, online consumer-generated contents are taking on an important role in online travelers' information search and decision-making processes.

With the increasing importance of online peer-to-peer (P2P) information exchange, a rising number of studies have investigated eWOM communications. Previous studies have examined if traditional WOM models fit eWOM communications (Brown, Broderick, & Lee, 2007; Jin, Block, & Cameron, 2002; Vilpponen, Winter, & Sundqvist, 2006), how eWOM influences consumers' perceptions and decision-making processes (Bickart & Schindler, 2001; Chatterjee, 2001; Gruen, Osmonbekov, & Czapslewski, 2006; Senecal & Nantel, 2004; Smith, Menon, & Sivakumar, 2005), whether eWOM sources are more influential compared to other types of sources (Bickart & Schindler, 2001; Senecal & Nantel, 2004; Smith et al., 2005) and why consumers seek eWOM (Goldsmith & Hrowitz, 2006; Hennig-Thurau & Walsh, 2003; Schindler & Bickart, 2005) or contribute to eWOM (Hennig-Thurau, Gwinner, Walsh, & Gremler, 2004; Wang & Fesenmaier, 2004).

Consumer reviews and ratings are the most accessible and prevalent form of eWOM (Chatterjee, 2001). This form of eWOM is also of great importance in travel and tourism and it is crucial for

marketers and providers of review sites to understand what motivates consumers to write reviews. Consequently, an online travel review study was conducted to investigate users' motivations to post travel reviews on travel review sites. The goals of this study were twofold: 1) to identify important motives for contributing online travel reviews, and 2) to examine differences in motivations based on demographic characteristics.

## Theoretical Foundations

### *Electronic Word-of-Mouth Communications*

Traditional word-of-mouth (WOM) has long been recognized as an important factor influencing consumer behavior (Whyte, 1954) and extensive studies have investigated WOM communication in face-to-face settings. However, the development of the Internet introduces new forms of WOM communication (Granitz & Ward, 1996) for which traditional assumptions might not apply. The Internet has extended WOM communication from communication characterized by intimacy to a broadcasting-like ability to communicate with the masses (Blackshaw & Nazzaro, 2004). The Internet has therefore clearly empowered consumers, providing an efficient vehicle for sharing information and opinions (Litvin, Goldsmith, & Pan, 2007). Further, electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) is stored in written records often available to the public (Granitz & Ward, 1996). Consequently, eWOM information is more easily referable (Schindler & Bickart, 2005) and nonperishable (Dellarocas, 2006), leading to a potentially greater impact on a greater number of consumers.

With the increasing importance of eWOM, a number of researchers have conceptualized eWOM communication. Litvin et al. (2007) defined eWOM as "all informal communications directed at consumers through Internet-based technology related to the usage or characteristics of particular goods and services, or their sellers" (p. 4). Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004) referred to eWOM communication as "any positive or negative statement made by potential, actual, or former customers about a product or company, which is made available to a multitude of people and institutions via the Internet" (p. 39). Several eWOM studies have investigated the role and impacts of eWOM in consumers' per-

ceptions and decision-making processes. Bickart and Schindler (2001) found that Internet consumer forums are more influential sources than marketer-generated sources. Gruen et al. (2005) argued that eWOM communication influences customer perceptions of product value and the likelihood to recommend products. Positive impacts of online recommendations on consumers' product choice were also found (Senecal & Nantel, 2004; Smith et al. 2005).

Online WOM can be generated in a variety of ways, for instance through email, instant messaging, homepages, blogs, online communities, newsgroups, chat rooms, hate sites, review sites, and social networking sites (Chatterjee, 2001; Dellarcas, 2003; Goldsmith & Horowitz, 2006; Hennig-Thurau, 2004; Litvin et al. 2007). Among the various venues for eWOM, online virtual communities are one of the most established (Armstrong & Hagel, 1996) and both scholars and practitioners are interested in eWOM communication behavior in the context of virtual communities because of the extraordinary popularity, growth, and influence of such communities (Brown et al., 2007).

### *Virtual Community*

The term "virtual community" means different things to different people (Bishop, 2003). Bishop (2003) argued that virtual community refers to a specific website that facilitates discussion on a particular subject or interest to some people, but to others it refers to a group of people that communicate with each other on a regular basis using tools such as instant messaging. Indeed, competing definitions of virtual community currently exist. Litvin et al. (2007) referred to virtual communities as "groups of online individuals who share interests and interact with one another" (p. 464). Armstrong and Hagel (1996) understood virtual communities as online venues where active members provide evaluations and opinions on products and firms. In addition, Toder-Alon, Brunel, and Schneier Siegal (2005) argued that virtual communities should be viewed as the result of continuous process of reciprocal social construction, not as ontologically real entities.

Virtual communities also take many forms (Bishop, 2007). According to Litvin et al. (2007),

online communities vary in the scope of their content from the simple form of resources collections to complex cyber environments offering net-citizenship and supporting member interactions. They also pointed out that virtual communities differ in terms of sponsorship. Some communities have arisen spontaneously from the realm of consumers, but others are sponsored or managed by companies (Flavian & Guinaliu, 2005). For example, there are virtual communities established by consumers to share similar interests such as wine lovers' Virtual Vineyards and communities that evolved around products and brands and are managed by companies, like Apple's virtual community (Apple.com/usergroups) (Litvin et al., 2007).

In spite of these competing definitions and fluidity of forms of virtual communities, virtual community research has agreed on the promising importance of the phenomenon in consumer behavior. Wellman, Salaff, Dimitrova, and Garton (1996) argued that online communities become an important supplement to social and consumption behavior. According to Werry (1999), online community is frequently described as central to the commercial development of the Internet and to the future of narrowcasting and mass customization in the wider world of marketing and advertising. Bishop (2007) also urged that online communities are increasingly becoming an accepted part of the lives of Internet users, serving to fulfill their desires to interact with and help others.

Because of the experiential nature of tourism, virtual tourism communities have provided a key foundation to foster needed communication among travelers and between travelers and travel suppliers (Lee & Gretzel, 2006). More and more travelers are turning to online travel communities to fulfill their needs for communication, information, and entertainment (Wang, Yu, & Fesenmaier, 2002). Such communities have brought benefits to both individual travelers and travel service companies in that they serve different information and communication needs of travelers and encourage eWOM behavior (Wang & Fesenmaier, 2004). Currently, various types of travel communities are available online and millions of travelers share and exchange information about travel products through these communities. More than 5 million travelers a month utilize Virtualtourist.com to search travel

destinations and activities and more than 5,000 posts are contributed a day to The Thorn Tree Forum on Lonelyplanet.com (Lee & Gretzel, 2006). Over 24 million online users visit TripAdvisor.com a month (TripAdvisor.com, 2007). Indeed, TripAdvisor.com is one of the largest and most popular online travel communities (Eyefortravel, 2005). According to data released by comScore Media Metrix (2007), TripAdvisor has become the second most visited travel site in the world with nearly 6.5 million visitors during May 2007. As of September 1, 2007, it featured over 10 million travel reviews and over 750,000 photos posted by travelers (TripAdvisor.com, 2007). TripAdvisor is also interesting as it constitutes a community of content in which social interaction is not necessarily a major purpose of its users. It has only recently added social networking features to support community interactions beyond content provision (TravelMole, 2007). According to the typology provided by Litvin et al. (2007), which classifies eWOM media based on communication scope and level of interactivity, TripAdvisor can be described as an online travel community that supports less interactivity and has a smaller communication scope compared to traditional virtual communities. While research has largely been conducted for virtual communities focused on interaction and communication, little is known about communities of content like TripAdvisor. One cannot automatically assume that motivations are the same for all kinds of communities. Also, the specific characteristics of travel need to be taken into account in order to understand travel review writer motivations. Therefore, a study was conducted to conceptualize motivations for review platforms focused on travel.

#### *Motivations for Contributing eWOM*

For traditional WOM communication, the motives of consumers to generate WOM have been investigated in a number of studies. Dichter (1966) identified four motives of positive WOM communication: product-involvement, self-involvement, other-involvement, and message-involvement. Extending Dichter's findings, Engel, Blackwell, and Miniard (1993) suggested five motives by adding dissonance reduction. The study of Sundaram, Mi-

tra, and Webster (1998) reported eight motives for both positive and negative WOM communication. They proposed that consumers generate positive WOM because of the motives of altruism, product involvement, self-enhancement, and helping the company, while negative WOM is spread with the motives of altruism, anxiety reduction, vengeance, and advice seeking.

In the context of eWOM communication, very limited research has been conducted to understand the motives of people to engage and contribute online contents. Recently, Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004) integrated the motives found for traditional WOM behavior with the motives derived from the specific features of eWOM on consumer opinion platforms. Their study introduced 11 motives for engaging in eWOM communication. They also developed questionnaire items and empirically tested the scales with 2,000 consumers. Out of the 11 suggested motives, eight motivation factors were extracted: platform assistance, venting negative feelings, concern for other consumers, extraversion/positive self-enhancement, social benefits, economic incentives, helping the company, and advice seeking. In the context of online travel communities, Wang and Fesenmaier (2004) investigated the benefits derived and the incentives online travel community members have for participating and contributing. They suggested that community members participate in online travel communities for functional, social, psychological, and hedonic benefits and contribute contents for instrumental, efficacy, quality control, status, and expectancy reasons.

These eWOM motivation studies extend our knowledge of eWOM communication but their findings are limited in that they conceptualized motivations to contribute in the context of opinion platforms with high levels of interactivity and social forms of communication. Their measurement scales and findings cannot necessarily be applied to review sites such as TripAdvisor.com. Based on a review of the WOM literature and the specific features of communities of content in travel, seven distinct motives that are more appropriate for online travel review sites were derived: 1) enjoyment; 2) exertion of collective power over companies; 3) venting negative feelings; 4) concerns for

other consumers; 5) helping the company, 6) expressing positive feelings; and 7) self-enhancement.

*Enjoyment or Hedonic Motivation.* Many people simply enjoy sharing their travel experiences and expertise with other travelers, and posttrip sharing of information is often considered as one of the joys of travel (Litvin et al., 2007). The hedonic perspective understands travel consumers as pleasure seekers engaged in activities for enjoyment, entertainment, amusement, and fun, and, in fact, enjoyment was identified as an important motive for eWOM contributions in the context of travel (Wang & Fesenmaier, 2004). Accordingly, enjoyment was included as a factor in this study to understand motives to write online travel reviews.

*Exercise Collective Power Over Companies.* eWOM communication differs from WOM in offline settings in many aspects (Chatterjee, 2001). According to Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004), Internet communication has distinct characteristics because it is anonymous, available to multiple individuals for an indefinite period of time and also accessible to companies interested in learning about consumer opinions. It thus provides immense opportunity to consumers to organize themselves and collectively voice opinions. Such collective communication is much more powerful than individual efforts and can be a great motivation to use online travel review sites. Having an outlet to voice opinions and to have an impact should be especially important in the context of tourism, where product providers are often unreachable to the consumer because of the geographical distance and language barriers as well as differences in legal systems. Also, many tourism providers are very small and do not have customer service departments, creating a need for consumers to find other outlets for their opinions. This motive was thus considered in this study to investigate the motives of online travel review writers.

*Venting Negative Feelings.* The motive of venting negative feelings emerges from dissatisfying consumption experiences (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004). Emotions such as sadness, anger, and frustration felt after disappointing consumption experiences motivate consumers to seek ways to lessen

the frustration and reduce anxiety (Sundaram et al., 1998) as well as to feel catharsis (Alicke et al., 1992). These desires often drive consumers to articulate their negative personal experiences (Alicke et al., 1992), and online review sites can serve as the place to ease negative feelings associated with unsatisfying consumption experiences. The characteristics of tourism services, especially inseparability of production and consumption, high consumer involvement, high expectations, and the relative cost compared to other expenses, lead to a greater potential for dissatisfaction. Consequently, venting was included as a potentially important motive for those who contribute to online travel review sites.

*Concern for Other Consumers.* People often share their experiences with others to help or warn them. This is particularly important for tourism where consumers very often rely on the advice of others. This motive is closely related to the concept of altruism (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004), and altruism has been suggested as an important motive for consumers to generate WOM (Sundaram et al., 1998) as well as eWOM (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004). Consequently, online travel review writers are likely motivated to write reviews by the desire to help other consumers and also to save others from potential negative experiences.

*Helping the Company.* Consumers also share their experiences to support the service provider. When consumers have a satisfying experience with a product, it results in a desire to reciprocate the favor (Sundaram et al., 1998); thus, consumers often engage in eWOM communication to return something to the company for their good experience (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004). This motive can be understood based on equity theory (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004; Oliver & Swan, 1989). According to equity theory, consumers seek equitable and fair exchanges. When consumers receive a higher output/input ratio than the company, the consumers try to find a way for the output/input ratio to be equalized. Writing positive reviews about the company that provided good products or services can be one way to equalize the ratio (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004). Again, as tourists

are often geographically removed from providers and might not be able to give back through frequent patronage, this motive seems to be very important to consider in the context of travel reviews.

*Expressing Positive Feelings.* Successful consumption experiences motivate consumers to express their positive feelings (Sundaram et al., 1998). According to Dichter (1966), consumers' positive experience with a product contributes to a psychological tension inside them that makes consumers want to share their joy with others. That tension can be eased when consumers write comments in an online community because the behavior allows the consumer to share their positive feelings with other people (Henning-Thurau et al., 2004). Travel review sites are a possible venue for consumers to express their positive emotions by writing reviews. Therefore, this motive was considered to be important for this study.

*Self-Enhancement.* The motive of self-enhancement is driven by one's desire for positive recognition from others (Engel et al., 1993; Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004; Sundaram et al., 1998). In the context of travel review sites on which the level of social interaction is low, this motive is rather described as inner feelings of self-enhancement through contributions or reflecting on one's own experiences. Self-enhancement can be derived from participation as one feels good about helping other users to solve problems or answer questions about a product (Henning-Thurau et al., 2004).

On the other hand, platform assistance was not considered to be important because travel providers do not offer customer service through review sites, there are no moderators on review sites, and consumers cannot post questions as would be the case in other types of virtual communities. Also, travel review sites such as TripAdvisor do not provide economic incentives and do not focus on social interactions between consumers; consequently, these dimensions were not considered for the purpose of this study.

#### *Differences in WOM Behavior Based on Demographic Characteristics*

Existing statistics suggest that online users' eWOM behaviors differ based on demographic

variables. Younger users more likely visit and proactively interact with a social networking site (Forrester Research, 2006; iProspect, 2007), use consumer-generated media more (eMarketer, 2007c), and are also more likely to be online content creators (Pew Internet & American Life Project, 2006a). The influence of eWOM is greater for this younger group, with 85% of them indicating that they primarily learned about new products through WOM (eMarketer, 2007d). Only 7% of adult WOM happens online compared to 19% of WOM for teens (eMarketer, 2007e). Especially boomers prefer WOM through personal contact (eMarketer 2007f). In addition to age differences, research also suggests that female Internet users have been found to be more likely influenced by recommendations received from friends than marketer-based information (eMarketer, 2007g). Similarly, Garbarino and Strahilevitz (2004) reported the perceived risk of online shopping is decreased more for women when they receive a website recommendation from friends. Differences also occur based on income, with lower income classes being less likely to engage in WOM (eMarketer, 2007g) but being slightly more likely to post content online (Pew Internet & American Life Project, 2006a).

As far as the motivations to engage in WOM communication are concerned, there is a lack of research regarding demographic differences. If at all, studies have investigated gender differences. Bakan (1966) argued that males are guided by self-focused goals while females are believed to be guided more by communal concerns. Males are traditionally driven by self-efficacy, self-assertion, and achievement orientation (Bakan, 1966; Meyers-Levy, 1988; Meyers-Levy & Sternthal, 1991), but the role of females has been understood as fostering harmonious relations, affiliation with others, and a strong concern for other people's feelings (Meyers-Levy, 1988; Shani, Sandler, & Long, 1992). Indeed, a study by Swanson, Gwinner, Larson, and Janda (2003) found a psychological motivation difference for verbal recommendations. Their findings suggest that men were more likely to engage in WOM behavior based on self-esteem enhancement than women. It appears that the motives to contribute online travel reviews could differ based on the demographic characteristics of users. Such differences need to be empirically tested

to better inform studies regarding motivations to contribute to online communities. Thus, this study hypothesized that motivations to write online travel reviews would be different depending on writers' demographic characteristics.

## Methodology

### *Data Collection and Sample*

As TripAdvisor is currently the most prominent online travel review site, TripAdvisor users were selected as the sample for the study. Data for the study was collected using a Web-based survey that was administered during a 4-week period between January 5 and January 31, 2007. The respondents were from the TripAdvisor traveler panel. This panel includes TripAdvisor users mostly from the US but also including users from Canada, the UK, and Australia. To avoid potential bias, consumers who work in or live with someone who works in market research, advertising, marketing, media/news, or public relations are excluded from participation in the panel and thus were not part of the sample. Also, the sample used for the study included only consumers who had taken pleasure trips in the previous year and/or anticipated taking pleasure trips the following year. A total of 7,000 randomly selected panelists received an email invitation to complete the survey and 1,480 actually participated, resulting in a 21.1% response rate. The respondents' characteristics were compared to the characteristics of the overall panel membership and no significant differences were found, suggesting that respondents are representative of the overall panel membership. Of the 1,480 respondents, only those 1,197 (83%) who had previously posted online travel reviews were included for data analysis.

### *Measures*

In order to understand the motivations of travelers to write online travel reviews, the above-described list of seven motivations to contribute reviews was used to create a measurement instrument. Six out of the seven motivations resemble motivations proposed by Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004). Consequently, our study adapted and modified their items for those six motives. The rest of

the motivations proposed by Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004) were not applicable to the context of TripAdvisor as it did not provide opportunities for interactions at the time of the study, does not provide economic incentives, and there is no platform moderator who would support consumers in problem-solving attempts. A seventh dimension of motivation was added based on the emphasis placed on hedonic motivation in the context of travel (Litvin et al., 2007; Wang & Fesenmaier, 2004). In total, a list of 15 motivation items was developed based on previously developed scales to test motivations in the context of a travel-related review site. All items were measured on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree.

### *Analysis*

The motivation scales were tested for their dimensionality and reliability. Because the motivation scale was never tested in this form and in the context of travel review sites, an exploratory factor analysis was conducted to examine the structure and potential overlap of the motivations. Principle component analysis (PCA) using Varimax rotation was used for the factor analysis to examine the dimensional structure of the scales. To test the reliability of the scales, Cronbach's alpha and interitem correlations were used. In addition, descriptive analysis was conducted to investigate which motivations were more prominent in the context of an online travel review site. Independent-sample *t*-tests were performed to examine differences in motivations based on demographic variables.

## Results

### *Profile of Respondents*

As shown in Table 1, more females (62.3%) than males (37.7%) participated in the survey. Most respondents (about 80%) reported being married or living with a partner. A majority of respondents (77.7%) reported having children under 17 living in their household. Respondents were mostly between 35 and 64 years old (77.6%) with a large percentage (70.6%) having received a college or postgraduate degree. The majority (53.8%)

Table 1  
Demographic Profile of Respondents Who  
Contribute Reviews

Characteristics	Frequency ( <i>n</i> = 1,197)	Respondents (%)
Gender		
Male	451	37.7
Female	746	62.3
Age		
18–25	28	2.3
26–34	178	14.9
35–49	434	36.3
50–64	494	41.3
65 or older	63	5.3
Marital status		
Not married	241	20.1
Married/living with partner	956	79.9
Children living in household		
Yes	930	77.7
No	267	22.3
Annual household income		
Less than \$10,000	6	0.7
\$10,000–\$29,999	22	2.4
\$30,000–\$49,999	91	10.1
\$50,000–\$69,999	148	16.4
\$70,000–\$89,999	150	16.6
\$90,000–\$109,999	141	15.6
\$110,000–\$129,999	106	11.7
\$130,000–\$149,999	64	7.1
\$150,000 or more	175	19.4
Education		
Some high school	26	2.2
High school graduate	90	7.5
Some college	214	17.9
College graduate	466	38.9
Postgraduate degree	380	31.7
Other	21	1.8
Number of trips in the past 12 months		
None	28	2.3
1–2 trips	286	23.9
3–4 trips	462	38.6
5–6 trips	254	21.2
7–8 trips	75	6.3
9 trips or more	92	7.7

had an annual household income of \$90,000 or greater. The respondents' profiles were compared to the characteristics of the overall panel membership and no differences were found. Over one third (38.6%) of the respondents reported having taken three to four pleasure trips in the previous 12 months. A large percentage (35.2%) of respondents had taken five trips or more and nearly one quarter (23.9%) of the respondents said they had taken one to two pleasure trips in the previous 12 months.

Because the sample consisted of TripAdvisor users, the respondents were clearly more inclined to use the Internet than a general population of travelers. Over 86% reported that they were very skilled at using the Internet. Not surprisingly, all of the respondents said they used the Internet to plan at least some aspects of pleasure trips. A large majority of the respondents (85.8%) reported they use the Internet always for their trip planning. About 15% of respondents use it often (11.2%) or at least sometimes (3%). When planning pleasure trips, the clear majority of respondents (92.5%) look at materials posted by consumers, 65.7% read travel-related blogs, 27.9% watch videos online, and only 6.6% listen to travel-related audio files/podcasts in the travel planning process.

#### *Motivations to Post Online Travel Reviews*

The 15 items developed to measure motivations to post online travel reviews were subjected to PCA to examine the dimensionality of the entire set of items. Before the PCA, a correlation matrix of all items was examined to assess the suitability of data for factor analysis. The correlation matrix indicated that many coefficients were 0.3 and above, thus supporting the factorability of the items. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy value and the significance of Bartlett's test of sphericity also confirmed the appropriateness of the data. The KMO value was 0.83, exceeding the recommended requirement of 0.6 (Kaiser, 1970, 1974) and Bartlett's test for sphericity (Bartlett, 1954) also reached statistical significance ( $p = 0.000$ ).

Four factors with eigenvalues greater than 1 were identified. These four factors explained 65.8% of the total variance: 29.7%, 18.3%, 10.6% and 7.2% of the variance, respectively. The factor loadings and Cronbach's alpha values (Pearson product moment correlation coefficients in the case of two item solutions) for each of the factors are presented in Table 2. All values exhibit satisfactory properties.

While seven motivational dimensions were proposed based on the literature review, the factor analysis results suggest a four-factor solution. Factor 1 combines three motives (enjoyment, expressing positive feelings, and self-enhancement) that

Table 2  
Factor Loadings and Reliability Test for the Motivation Measurement Model

Motivation Construct	Mean	Factor Loadings	Eigenvalue	% of Variance	Reliability
<b>Enjoyment/positive self-enhancement</b>	4.2		4.46	29.7	$\alpha = 0.87$
I enjoy it		0.80			
I want to share my travel experience with others		0.79			
It allows me to relive my trips		0.77			
It allows me to reflect on the trip after returning home		0.75			
I feel good when I can tell others about my trip successes		0.75			
I can tell others about a great experience		0.73			
I want to help others by sharing my own positive experiences		0.61			
<b>Venting negative feelings &amp; collective power</b>	2.8		2.74	18.3	$\alpha = 0.73$
If a company harms me, I will harm the company		0.80			
I want to take vengeance upon a travel service provider		0.79			
I believe travel service providers are more accommodating when I publicize matters		0.65			
One has more power together with others than writing a single letter of complaint		0.60			
<b>Concerns for other consumers</b>	4.2		1.59	10.6	$r = 0.62$
I want to save others from having the same negative experience as me		0.82			
I want to warn others of bad services		0.77			
<b>Helping the company</b>	4.5		1.08	7.2	$r = 0.54$
If I am satisfied with a travel service provider I want to help it be successful		0.85			
Good travel service providers should be supported		0.81			

focus on the communicator's positive affect and psychological benefits of engaging in eWOM. This factor was labeled *enjoyment/positive self-enhancement*. The two motives of venting negative feelings and exertion of collective power also joined together to form one dimension. These motives are related to negative eWOM behaviors, thus this factor was named *venting negative feelings & collective power* (Factor 2). One item ("I want to help others by sharing my own positive experiences") that intended to measure concerns for other consumers actually loaded onto Factor 1. In the study of Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004), this element also loaded not just on the intended construct but also on extroversion/positive self-enhancement. The remaining factors (*concerns for other consumers* and *helping the company*) formed as expected two separate dimensions.

The results of the reliability tests support the internal consistency of the respective constructs. Hair, Anderson, Tatham, and Black (1998) explained that 0.70 is the generally agreed upon lower limit for Cronbach's alpha and exceeding 0.30 is suggested for the interitem correlations. In

our study, Cronbach's alpha values were 0.87 and 0.73 for Factor 1 and Factor 2, respectively, providing support for internal consistency. The interitem correlations for Factor 3 and Factor 4 were 0.62 and 0.54, respectively, also supporting the reliability of the scales. The factor loadings for individual items were very high for all four factors.

Additive scales were constructed based on the four exerted factors. The results of descriptive analysis indicate that online travel review writers are mostly motivated by the motives of helping a travel service provider (mean = 4.5), concerns for other travelers (mean = 4.2), and needs for enjoyment/positive self-enhancement (mean = 4.2). Clearly, venting negative feelings is not seen as an important motive with a mean of only 2.8.

#### *Demographic Differences*

Significant differences in motivations were found for gender and income level but not for age, education, children in household, and marital status. Gender differences were found for motives of enjoyment/positive self-enhancement, venting nega-

tive feelings & exercising collective power, as well as helping the company ( $p < 0.001$ ) (Table 3). The results indicate that females are more motivated by being able to help the company through their reviews and by being able to enjoy themselves and experience positive self-enhancement while motivations of venting negative feelings and exercising collective power are higher for males. Bakan (1966) asserted that males are guided by self-focused goals in contrast to females driven by communal concerns. Our empirical findings support his idea because the results indicate that males are more motivated to ease their own negative feelings while females show stronger motivations to help the company. The motive of enjoyment/positive self-enhancement was found to be higher for women. In contrast to our result, the study by Swanson et al. (2003) found men were more likely to engage in WOM behavior based on self-esteem enhancement than woman.

To test the differences in income level, respondents were categorized into two groups: low and high income. The low-income group included respondents with annual household incomes of less than \$69,999 before taxes while high-income group members are those who reported incomes of \$70,000 to \$150,000 or more. Significant differences were found between the two groups with respect to two motives, venting negative feelings & exercising collective power and concerns for other consumers ( $p < 0.05$ ) (Table 4). These two motivations are stronger for the low-income group than the high-income group. These differences can possibly be explained when taking the higher perceived risk of travel for low-income groups into account (Roehl & Fesenmaier, 1992).

## Discussion

Consumer-generated content sites can only thrive if motivations to generate content are well understood. The findings of this study provide important insights with respect to motivations to contribute content in a virtual community setting centered on content rather than social interactions. Specifically, online travel review writers seem to be largely driven by the need to reciprocate great experiences provided by travel and tourism companies, followed by altruism and hedonic motivations. Thus, travel review sites should stress these aspects of the community and emphasize such motivations in their communications geared toward encouraging users to leave online travel reviews. It also seems that hedonic motivations are currently not sufficiently taken into account by the design of such sites. Opportunities to have fun and to enjoy travel-related contents need to be embedded in the design of virtual travel community websites.

The findings are also important for travel service providers in that they show that great service quality will be rewarded by consumers with positive eWOM behavior. On the other hand, helping other consumers is also an important motivation, and one can expect that a travel service provider's failure to deliver will be made public through online travel reviews to prevent other consumers from having similar negative experiences. However, the study also found that venting negative feelings is clearly not a strong motivation for travel review writers. This suggests that travel service providers should not hesitate to provide eWOM communication venues on company web-

Table 3  
*t*-Test Results Comparing Motivations of Female and Male

Motivations	Female (Mean)	Male (Mean)	Mean Difference	<i>t</i> -Value ( <i>df</i> )
Enjoyment/positive self-enhancement	4.27	4.02	0.25	6.56** (1195)
Venting negative feelings/collective power	2.66	2.87	-0.21	-4.15** (1195)
Concerns for other consumers	4.23	4.20	0.03	0.74 (1195)
Helping the company	4.58	4.41	0.17	4.72** (895)

\*\* $p < 0.001$ .

Table 4

*t*-Test Results Comparing Motivations of Low-Income and High-Income Groups

Motivations	Low Income (Mean)	High Income (Mean)	Mean Difference	<i>t</i> -Value ( <i>df</i> )
Enjoyment/positive self-enhancement	4.25	4.16	0.08	1.73 (901)
Venting negative feelings/collective power	2.86	2.71	0.15	2.37* (901)
Concerns for other consumers	4.31	4.18	0.14	2.25* (901)
Helping the company	4.56	4.50	0.06	1.37 (901)

\**p* < 0.05.

sites. Because consumer-generated contents have higher credibility, relevance, and empathy to consumers than marketer-generated information (Bickart & Schindler, 2001), providing consumers' opinions on one's site can enhance consumers' trust in the company as well as build new and deeper relationships between the service providers and their consumers (Wang & Fesenmaier, 2004).

From the academic perspective, the results derived from this study expand our understanding of motivations to contribute online contents. As discussed earlier, this study identified important motives for virtual communities that centered on content rather than social interactions. Results thus help researchers to better understand differences in types of virtual communities. At the same time, the findings show that certain motivations such as self-enhancement and helping others can be important across various community types.

In addition, while previous literature talks about general motivations, the findings of this study clearly show differences in motivations for users with specific demographic characteristics. It appears that females are more motivated by opportunities to help the company and to experience enjoyment/positive self-enhancement while motives of venting negative feelings are higher for males. Also low-income groups are found to be more motivated by desires to vent negative feelings and concerns for other consumers. Such differences need to be taken into account when online travel review sites develop strategies to encourage member participation.

Although this study provides some interesting insights, still many research questions need to be explored. As the TripAdvisor community is exposed to new social networking features, one can

expect that motivations to engage in content creation on the site might shift to include more social interaction and social status motivations. Thus, future studies should consider social networking aspects, which are not satisfactorily covered in previous studies examining traditional virtual communities of strangers. Also this study only investigated motivational differences based on gender and income level. Because previous research suggests possible differences in other demographic variables (Forrester, 2006; iProspect, 2007), these should be explored in future studies. In addition, the relationship between motivations and posting behaviors in terms of number of reviews and frequencies of posting would be interesting to examine.

The rising importance of consumer-generated content is a phenomenon with enormous implications for Web design and for travel and tourism service providers and marketers. While some research exists regarding eWOM behavior and virtual community participation in travel, not enough is known about the drivers of the consumer-generated media revolution and its impact on travel information search and decision making. While this study provided some insights, there is clearly more research to be done in this area.

#### Biographical Notes

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