CASE STUDY: THE SOCIAL MEDIA USE OF TRAVEL BLOGGERS’

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SPRING 2015

A thesis
Submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements
for a baccalaureate degree
in Advertising/Public Relations
with honors in Telecommunications

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ABSTRACT

As a "disruptive technology" the Internet has radically altered many industries, including the travel industry. Hotel and airfare search engines dramatically reshaped the travel industry, creating more price competition and driving many travel agencies out of business as travelers began to search for and book their own rental cars, hotels, and airfare. Today, social media and blogs are similarly weakening the dominance of traditional printed travel guidebooks and magazines. Destinations have responded by altering their marketing campaigns to include the use of social media and the burgeoning field of travel bloggers. This study aims to explore how travel blogs incorporate social media to increase effectiveness when engaging in destination campaigns.

Using two travel blogs as the cases, ThePlanetD.com and TravelsofAdam.com, this research is designed in the multiple-case study format. For each blogger: a campaign was selected, social media content related to the campaign were analyzed to write interview questions, then a one hour Skype interview was conducted. The study found that Twitter is the platform most commonly used in destination campaigns; however, the use of Instagram is on the rise. Additionally, the use of video is important when working with destinations. Travel bloggers use social media in different ways, with some following a strategic/planned approach, while others follow an organic/real-time approach. While promoting their destination to an engaged audience is valuable to the DMO, the value social media offers bloggers is the ability to connect with their audience.
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

It is hard to comprehend that my time at the Pennsylvania State University is coming to an end. Towards the end of high school, some people had questioned my decision to only apply to Penn State; however, looking back it is clear that it has been one of the best decisions I have made in my life. Over the past four years, I have split my time between Penn State Altoona and Penn State University Park, with two stops in Europe to study abroad. I would like to take some time to acknowledge and thank the people who are responsible for making my time at Penn State very special.

First, I would like to thank the College of Communications for providing me an outstanding education. I have had the pleasure to be educated by some of the best professors there are and it is thanks to their instruction that I am where I am today. Prior to my junior year, I was not a Schreyer honors student. If it were not for the college’s advising office, who recommended I schedule the honors public relations class instead of the regular class, I do not believe I would be graduating with honors.

I would also like to thank Dr. Susan Strohm, who has served as my honors advisor over the past two years. When I made the decision to take the honors public relations course, Dr. Strohm was the one to recommend I apply to the Schreyer Honors College through the gateway admissions process; which admits Penn State students to the Schreyer Honors College after their sophomore year. Dr. Strohm also served as one of my honors professors when I honors optioned my capstone advertising campaigns course. Thanks to her class I was able to showcase the full extent of my advertising knowledge I learned at Penn State. It is thanks to her advice and guidance that I will graduate with honors.
Next, I need to thank the Head of the Department of Telecommunications, Dr. Matthew Jackson, who has served as my thesis supervisor. It is thanks to his knowledge, expertise, and valuable time, that I was able to complete this thesis. I would also like to extend my thanks to the professors of my other honors classes, Dr. Michel Haigh and Dr. Michael Elavsky. Dr. Haigh’s public relations course was my first introduction to being an honors student. While, Dr. Elavsky’s world media systems course, which included an embedded spring break trip to the Czech Republic, taught me important life lessons about global relations.

To the Schreyer scholars of past years, fellow class of 2015 Schreyer scholars, and all alumni of the Pennsylvania State University, I would like to thank you for making our University one of the most prestigious Universities there is. Thank you for your dedication to Penn State and your emphasis on achieving “success with honor.”

Finally, and most importantly, I need to thank my friends and family. To my parents, who have supported me financially and emotionally, not only during my time at Penn State, but for my entire life; thank you for love and support. I would not be here today if it were not for you. To my friends, thank you for friendship over the years; it is thanks to your help and support over the years that I have made it this far.
INTRODUCTION

Travel Blogging Today: It’s Complicated

In July 2013, the New York Times published an article focused on the travel blogging industry. The article starts with the following quote:

“When Keith Jenkins plans a trip, he doesn’t have to cobble together vacation days, or frequent flier miles, or scour the Web for deals on big-ticket items like hotels. Mr. Jenkins, the Amsterdam-based blogger behind Velvet Escape (velvetescape.com), simply finds sponsors” (Saltzstein).

One such occasion was when Mr. Jenkins put together a campaign for Cape Town’s local tourism agency. At the time the article was written, the agency considered the campaign “its most successful social media campaign to that point” (Saltzstein). Mr. Jenkins is not the only travel blogger to partner with destinations. In fact, it has become common for a travel destination to partner with travel bloggers. Today there are thousands of independent writers and photographers starting their own blogs with hopes of partnering with brands and destinations.

The article finishes by discussing how the blogging process is evolving. Many bloggers are now using social media, such as Twitter or Facebook, to drive traffic to their blog. They use it to “create buzz” before a trip, discuss their travels during their trip, and then send out links to blog posts after the trip (Saltzstein).

This thesis examines the phenomenon of travel blogging and the burgeoning role of social media more closely. The purpose is to determine how professional travel bloggers utilize social media when engaging in destination marketing campaigns. The goal of this study was to determine which social media platforms are most commonly utilized in travel bloggers’
destination marketing campaigns, how the travel bloggers use each social media platform, and what value each platform offers the Destination Marketing Organization (DMO) and the blogger themselves.

This topic is important because it gives insights into recent changes in the advertising industry. Instead of disseminating messages through traditional media, more destinations are shifting parts of their marketing budgets to digital media. With the development of the internet, they now have the opportunity to create two-way conversations with consumers through the use of social media.

First this thesis will discuss the development of the internet and its impact on the travel industry. The literature review will then summarize the current research to date that has been done on travel blogs. The methodology section will explain the case study approach that was used for this thesis. The cases section will discuss the blogs that were chosen for this study and which campaigns were used. The findings section will then discuss the answers to the research questions. Finally, the discussion and conclusion sections will discuss themes found during the study and what the future of travel blogging may look like.

**The Internet and Web 2.0**

The Internet has revolutionized the way people live their lives. With a vast network of devices, from the desktop computer at home to the smartphone in their pockets, consumers have the ability to connect with people from all over the world. Today, Internet users can interact with each other through the use of email and social media platforms. However, the Internet has not always been so functional.
Over the past fifteen years the Internet has seen a rapid transformation which has led to the development of many new uses and applications. The cumulative change over the past two decades has been coined “Web 2.0” (O’Reilly). The early version of the Internet, Web 1.0, can be characterized as one-directional, which enabled users to view content on static websites; Web 2.0 on the other hand, allows bi-directional collaboration, in which users can interact and provide their own content (Goodchild 27).

The term Web 2.0 was first used in 1999 by Darci DiNucci, an interaction design consultant. In her article, *Fragmented Future*, she wrote, “The first glimmerings of Web 2.0 are beginning to appear, and we are just starting to see how that embryo might develop” (DiNucci 32). However, the term did not gain traction until O’Reilly Media and MediaLive International hosted their first “Web 2.0 Conference” in October 2004. In the year and a half following the conference, the term “Web 2.0” was cited more than 9.5 million times in Google (O’Reilly 18).

The development of Web 2.0 revolutionized the Internet by allowing for much more interaction between content creators and their audiences. Where the early Internet merely allowed users to read static web pages, Web 2.0 facilitated two-way interaction through the posting of comments and reviews. The ease with which users could now post their own content, rather than having to rely on professionals such as computer programmers and graphic artists, led to an explosion of social media and blogs.

**The History of Blogging**

One of the “most highly touted features of the Web 2.0 era is the rise of blogging” (O’Reilly 24). eMarketer defines a blog as, “a website maintained by a person, group or company with regular entries of commentary, descriptions of events or other content such as
photos or videos” (Verna 2). Personal home pages can be considered the predecessor to blogging, which were intended to be “complete presentations of the user’s interests” (Rettberg 7). The key difference between personal home pages and blogs is that blogs incorporate a personal diary format that is chronologically organized (O’Reilly 24).

The first blog is credited to Justin Hall, who started Links.net when he was a student at Swarthmore College in 1994 (“Colossal Content Marketing Report” 4). Hall used Links.net as an online diary in which he linked to other websites and commented on his personal life. At the time, the term “blog” didn’t exist; in fact, blogs were first called “weblogs,” when John Barger coined the term in 1997 (“Colossal Content Marketing Report” 4). Weblog referred to a website’s “web log,” which tracked “the total number of hits a site had received, how many unique visitors had visited, how much data had been transferred and other information about traffic to the site” (Rettberg 8). The term was later shortened to “blog” in 1999 by Peter Merholz (“Colossal Content Marketing Report” 4).

Blogging began to gain popularity in 2004, when Technorati, a blog search engine, saw the number of blogs double every month; that same year, Merriam-Webster made “blog” the word of the year due to the fact it was the most searched word on their online dictionary (Rettberg 13). Several factors influenced the increased popularity of blogging. First, blogging platforms, such as blogger.com, negated the technical skills required to blog; prior to Web 2.0, bloggers had to hand code each blog post. With blogging platforms, all users have to do is write the content and click “post.” Besides their ease of use, blogging platforms also reduced the cost of entry into this new marketplace, meaning anyone with access to a computer could easily create a blog (Verna 5).
Today, blogs are a major driver of many of the current changes in journalism and marketing, gaining popularity rapidly with the growth of social networks (Rettberg). In 2010, 51 percent of U.S. Internet users, or 113 million people, read a blog on a monthly basis (Verna 1). Estimating the total number of blogs has proven to be a difficult task. In 2012, Wordpress.com hosted over 50 million blogs. However, many blogs are no longer actively updated, making it difficult to estimate the current total number of blogs (Rettberg 16). With the number of blogs rising and the practice of maintaining a blog gaining in popularity, there are many different types of bloggers.

**Types of Blogs**

In its *State of the Blogosphere 2011*, Technorati separated bloggers into five different types: hobbyists, part-time professionals, full-time professionals, corporate, and entrepreneur (“State of the Blogosphere 2011”). According to Technorati, hobbyist bloggers “blog for fun” and do not generate income from their blog; professional part-time and full-time bloggers are “independent bloggers” who write blogs as their full-time job or on the side to supplement their income; corporate bloggers maintain a blog as a part of their full-time job for a company/organization they work for; while entrepreneur bloggers are individuals who write a blog for a company/organization they own (“State of the Blogosphere 2011”). For the 2011 report, 60 percent of respondents were categorized as hobbyists, 18 percent were professional (part or full-time), 8 percent were corporate, and 13 percent were entrepreneur bloggers (“State of the Blogosphere 2011”).

Blogs cover a wide range of topics including personal musing, fashion, music, technology, business, fitness, food, and travel. Personal musings are most commonly blogged about by hobbyists while professional, corporate, and entrepreneur bloggers most commonly
blog about technology. Corporate and entrepreneur bloggers often write blogs about business topics ("State of the Blogosphere 2011").

**Travel Blogging as a Profession**

Thanks to websites such as TravelPod.com or TravelBlog.org, anyone with Internet access can become a hobbyist travel blogger. All an Internet user has to do is go to these websites to create or consume travel related content. However, for the purposes of this study, the focus is professional bloggers who maintain blogs about travel as a business to generate income. In many cases, making a career out of blogging is entrepreneurial in nature, which can cause confusion when differentiating between professional bloggers and entrepreneur bloggers; for this study, entrepreneur bloggers are blogging about a business they have started, while the professional blogger’s business is their blog.

Professional travel bloggers write, edit and publish content related to the travel industry. However, they also wear many other hats and can often be considered “marketing managers, sales representatives, publicists, spokespeople, bookkeepers, website developers and chief executive officers” (Boecher 3). Usually, travel bloggers are skilled photographers and videographers who use their abilities to create engaging content (Boecher 5).

In order to turn travel blogging into a profession, bloggers must first build a sizable audience; doing this takes experience, quality content and time. Successful travel bloggers are generally considered opinion leaders in the travel industry. An opinion leader is “the agent who is an active user and who interprets the meaning of media messages or content for other users” (Pan, MacLaurin and Crotts 36). These other users, or readers when it comes to blogging, hold the blogger in high esteem and heavily consider their recommendations and advice (Pan,
MacLaurin and Crotts 36). Today, bloggers are not only concerned with building an audience on their blog, but also on their social media channels.

**Using Social Media for Travel Blogs**

The term “social media” was first adopted in 2008 to describe online many-to-many communication (Rettberg 13). Additionally, Merriam-Webster provides the following definition for social media: “forms of electronic communication through which users create online communities to share information, ideas, personal messages, and other content” (“Social Media Definition”). These days, popular social networking sites include Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Pinterest, Youtube, and Google+, among others. A 2014 study by Pew Research found that social media use is popular among adults online (see table 1).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1: Social Media Platform Use Among Online Adults</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Facebook</td>
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<td>Adult internet users who have a profile</td>
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<td>Adult women internet users who use...</td>
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<td>Adult men internet users who use...</td>
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<tr>
<td>Users who log in daily</td>
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<td>Users who log in several times a day</td>
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*Based on a 2014 study by Pew Research

For bloggers, social networks provide several benefits. First, they can be utilized as content dissemination channels. Prominent blogger, Darren Rowse of ProBlogger.net, recommends a blogging strategy in which the blog is seen as a “home base” and social media
accounts are utilized as “outposts” (Verna 8). With this strategy, social media can “serve as a marketing vehicle, essentially driving traffic via short teasers to longer content on the blog” (Verna 2).

Using the “home base/outpost” strategy, not only can the social media help to notify the blogger’s readers of new content, but it can also reach people who do not read the blog and potentially convert them to readers. This is important because social media users are more likely than average adults users to use blogs overall, and specifically as a tool to start an online search for a product or service (Verna 2). In fact, a study done by the Travel Industry Association of America found that 67 percent of “online travelers in the United States search for information on destinations or check prices or schedules via the Internet” (Pan, MacLaurin and Crotts 35).

Another benefit of using social networks is the development of secondary audiences. While some users in these audiences may not be interested in reading blog posts, they may be interested in the blogger’s photographs or other content. So by creating an Instagram audience, for example, the blogger has now found a way to reach a user who would not have seen his content otherwise; which benefits the client sponsoring the blogger’s content.

Finally, having social media channels can improve the blog’s ranking in search results, driving more traffic to the blog. Danny Sullivan, Editor-in-chief of SearchEngineLand, says “The links that you build through social media, the references, the authority – all can have an impact in various ways on how you are ranked and listed even in ‘regular’ search results” (“The Beginner's Guide to Blogging and Content Strategy” 15).
The Monetization of Travel Blogs

Building an audience is only the first step of monetizing a travel blog; from there, bloggers must develop several income channels in order to make a living. Each blogger has their own approach, but most of the time bloggers require several revenue streams to make a living from their blog. Common revenue streams include affiliate marketing, freelance content creation, and creating products (Makepeace).

Affiliate marketing is the practice of including links to products or services in a blog post. When a reader clicks on the link and then purchases the product or service, the blogger is compensated with a percentage of the sale. Matthew Karsten, who runs ExpertVagabond.com, primarily uses Amazon.com affiliate links on his blog (Karsten). Amazon calls their affiliate program “Amazon Associates;” depending on a bloggers monthly sale volume, they can earn from four to fifteen percent of the total purchase price as a commission (Amazon.com).

Freelance content creation can involve many types of content. Being paid to write articles for websites, corporate blogs, and print magazines are common among travel bloggers. With freelance writing bloggers can be paid by the word or a flat rate. Another form of freelance content creation includes visual content creation; in these cases, bloggers are paid to take photographs and create videos for brands and tourism boards (Makepeace).

One of the more common ways to make money from travel blogging is to create products, such as eBooks and destination guides. A prime example is a blogger named Earl, from WanderingEarl.com, who wrote the e-book *How to Live a Life of Travel*, which he sells for $27. Earl allows other bloggers to sell his book through his affiliate program; for every copy a blogger sells, Earl gives them 50% a commission, which nets them $12.50 (Baron). Other income
channels for travel bloggers include speaking engagements, selling advertising space, and offering services, such as, blogging advice or travel planning (Makepeace).

**Sponsored Blogging Campaigns with DMOs**

In addition to the income channels discussed in the prior section, many travel bloggers make money by partnering with brands or Destination Marketing Organizations (DMO’s). DMOs can include national, state, or local tourism offices. According to the U.S. Travel Association, tourism offices are tasked with promoting a destination’s “history, scenery, popular attractions, landscape, beauty, or other appealing features” (The Power of Travel Promotion 7).

DMOs use travel blogs as an alternative or complement to traditional advertising and marketing campaigns. The DMO contracts with a travel blogger to write about the destination. Partnerships between a destination and a travel blogger can be either paid to unpaid. A common partnership is when destination marketers bring travel bloggers in on press trips; most of the time bloggers are not compensated for press trips, but expenses, such as travel and accommodation are covered by the destination.

With partnerships that are paid, the amount of compensation depends on several factors including audience size, social media use, and the amount of content to be created. The rate a travel blogger charges varies, as there is no standard metric. The details of the trip are worked out in advance with a contract signed by both parties prior to the trip. What is included in the contract depends on the individual destination and blogger; sometimes the destination provides an itinerary and makes the bookings, while other times it is left to the blogger to make arrangements.
In either case, partnerships usually require the blogger to travel to the destination, participate in the culture and predetermined activities, and then write about their experiences. Prior to the trip, bloggers can promote their trip “through a series of “teaser posts” and content items across their social media channels; during the trip, they can “leverage their following on social media by producing valuable and influential content, based on their experiences”; after their trip, they will publish all content initially agreed upon (Boecher 5).

For the DMO, partnering with travel bloggers has several advantages over traditional advertising media. First, with a strong social media following, “many travel bloggers are highly social media savvy individuals and are able to take this usage to the next level, to really make the real-time engagement they can offer effective” (Boecher, 5). Second, blog content tends to have a long shelf life, meaning a consumer can access it several years after it was posted. Finally, online content is extremely track able. This means marketers can see exactly how many people saw the content, what demographic audience they are reaching, and how many readers followed the desired call-to-action (i.e. clicking through to the advertiser’s website, purchased a product, or downloaded an informational brochure).

In January 2014, Travel Alberta invited Pete and Dalene Heck, a Canadian couple who run the travel blog Hectic Travels, to Alberta for ten days. During their time in Alberta, they explored the Rockies, visited a wolfdog sanctuary, and tried a range of winter activities from skiing to bobsledding (Heck, “Enjoying an Alberta Winter”). While in Alberta, Pete and Dalene promoted their trip through social media using the hashtag #ExploreAlberta. After the trip ended they wrote eleven blog posts and continued promoting the destination through their social media accounts. Within four months their promotion received the following results: 32,000+ pageviews
(an average of 3,600+ per post), 7.6 million Twitter impressions from 700+ tweets, and 1,800+ Facebook impressions in the form of likes, shares, and comments (Heck, “Media Kit”).

While the practice of travel blogging as a profession is relatively new, partnerships between DMOs and travel bloggers are becoming more commonplace. Not only can bloggers offer content with a long shelf life through the posts on their blog, but they can also utilize social media to promote the destination in real time. With the rapid expansion of popular social media networks an important question is how travel bloggers are using these new tools to develop more effective marketing campaigns.
LITERATURE REVIEW

There has been very little research conducted on how travel bloggers use social media, which platforms are commonly utilized during campaigns for DMOs, or what value the social media platforms offer the blogger or the DMO. However, there have been some studies about how consumers use the Internet to acquire travel information, how DMOs use social media to interact with these consumers, and how DMOs can use travel blog content to research visitors’ opinions of the destination.

Consumers’ Internet Use in Travel

Today, the number of marketing channels available is increasing with each new technological innovation and development in global communications. These technological advances have led to media fragmentation and a change in consumer habits. With the changes in how consumers search for travel information, researchers have studied how consumers use the Internet when planning for their travels. Since travel products are intangible, consumers often rely on information they find online when researching a destination.

According to a study on social media in online travel information, “The Internet has fundamentally reshaped the way tourism related information is distributed and the way people plan for and consume travel” (Xiang and Gretzel 179). As early as 2005, 67 percent of online travelers in the U.S. used the Internet to research destinations or check prices and schedules; 41 percent used the Internet to book airline tickets, hotel rooms or rental cars (Pan, MacLaurin and Crotts 35). In 2013, global online travel and tourism sales were $590 billion, which accounted for 25 percent of total global travel and tourism sales (“Game Changing Technology” 6). That same year, the leading world region in terms of online travel sales was North America. In terms
of total travel sales, North America ranked third behind Asia Pacific and Western Europe, respectively (“Game Changing Technology” 8).

Nowadays, consumers are using multiple screens (smartphones, tablets, computers, etc.) when searching for travel information, with smartphones accounting for a majority of searches (“Game Changing Technology” 11). With regard to web searches, Google leads all search engines with a 65 percent global market share (“Game Changing Technology” 19). A September 2011 survey found that the most influential marketing channel for bookings was organic search engine listings (41%); other influential marketing channels included paid search (19%), email marketing (18%), and social media (11%) (Marcce, Munns and McKay 4).

**Consumer Generated Content**

Not only are consumers using the Internet to research for their trips, but they are also using it to share their experiences. For years, consumers have shared their experiences of using products and services with other consumers. In marketing, this exchange of information is called word-of-mouth promotion. The definition of word-of-mouth is as follows, “informal communication between consumers regarding the characteristics, ownership, and usage of a service or product” (Pan, MacLaurin and Crotts 36). Studies have shown that word-of-mouth or advice from friends and family often rank as the most “influential source of pre-purchase information” (Pan, MacLaurin and Crotts 35).

With consumers now using the Internet to research destinations, consumer generated content (CGC) has become an online form of word-of-mouth promotion. Sources of CGC online include review websites, social media networks, and blogs. The first source of CGC that is commonly used in a consumers research phase is review websites, including TripAdvisor, Hotels.com, and Expedia. Researchers have studied how consumers use travel reviews to better
make travel-related decisions; one study found that reviews are mainly used to make informed
decisions when booking accommodations (Gretzel and Yoo 2008). The other two sources of
CGC, social media and blogging, are not mutually exclusive. Researchers have studied the
different types of blogs and their role as a social media (Thevenot 2007). Xiang and Gretzel
found that social media make up a large part of search results, which can play a vital role in trip
planning (185). Whether a consumer trusts CGC depends on the website. However, research has
shown that consumers trust information from other travelers, “especially when posted on official
tourism bureau websites” (Yoo, Lee, Gretzel and Fesenmaier 55).

**Destination Marketers Use of Social Media**

There have been many studies that have researched how Destination Marketing
Organizations (DMOs) utilize social media platforms as a part of their marketing
communications. Susan Hudson and Karen Thal (2013) studied the impact social media has on
the consumer decision process using the Consumer Decision Journey developed by Court,
Elzinga, Mulder, and Vetnik. They proposed the Consumer Decision Journey has four parts:
Consider, Evaluate, Buy, and Enjoy-Advocate-Bond (Hudson and Thal, 2013; Court, Elzinga,
Mulder, and Vetnik, 2009). Hudson and Thal found that while consumers are influenced more
during the “evaluation” and “Enjoy, Advocate, Bond” stages, a majority of tourism marketers
budgets are spent on the “consider” and “buy” stages. They concluded that while some
destinations, including VisitBritain, are using social media to good effect, research suggests
many tourism companies are not using social media in a meaningful way (Hudson and Thal 159).

A study by Wendy Lange-Faria and Statia Elliot (2011) looked at the benefits of social
media from the supplier side (DMO) and the consumer side (“Understanding the Role”). One
benefit social media provides the DMO is the ability to “collaborate and streamline their
information, adding value for consumers, while building their brand through direct interaction with the consumer” (Lange-Faria and Elliot 204). Additionally, social media allows them to provide “immediate response to consumer queries and concerns” (Lange-Faria and Elliot 204). Consumers can benefit from the use of social media in that they can receive “what they perceive as more authentic information based on the experience of other travelers, and can design their trips to reflect more closely what they are looking for by interacting with both experienced travelers and residents of a destination” (Lange-Faria and Elliot 204).

Hays, Page and Buhalis (2012) conducted an exploratory study looking at Destination Marketing Organizations use of social media as a marketing tool. Using information provided by the United National World Tourism Organization about the top ten international destinations from 2010, the researchers studied seven of the top ten countries’ DMOs. Facebook and Twitter were the social media platforms selected for the content analysis. They found that every DMO that had both a Facebook and Twitter page had more Facebook likes than Twitter followers. Posts on both platforms often included additional content, that is multimedia or links, with 81 percent of Facebook posts and 82 percent of Twitter posts including content (Hays, Page and Buhalis 226). Twitter posts included links to external websites more often than Facebook posts, with 80 percent of Twitter posts and 51 percent of Facebook posts including links. The researchers reasoned that “when users access the website, they tend to, and want to, stay on Facebook.com rather than browse other sites on the Internet” (Hays, Page and Buhalis 226).

The research done by Hays, Page, and Buhalis, found that social media strategies vary considerably between top DMOs and they developed three key findings. First, a majority of the DMOs studied “are not currently utilising social media to their full effectiveness when it comes to the ability to interact and engage with consumers” (Hays, Page and Buhalis 236). Second,
while social media use by DMOs is on the rise, it is not “respected as a vital tool in marketing strategies, and thus is frequently underfunded and/or neglected” (Hays, Page and Buhalis 236). Finally, they found that “DMOs could benefit from becoming even more innovative and creative when it comes to their social media strategies, in order to fully differentiate these efforts from traditional marketing methods” (Hays, Page and Buhalis 236).

**Using Travel Blogs for Market Research**

Early research of travel blogs focused primarily on analyzing the blog content of specific destinations in order to inform destination marketers of visitors’ opinions. Prior to considering travel blogs, destinations would collect data through the use of in-person ‘tick-box’ surveys and in-depth interviews of current or past visitors (Carson 112). However, these methods were limited in a sense that they either yielded poor results due to a lack of depth or were too expensive. Blogs on the other hand could provide data that is closer to the ‘real’ thoughts and feelings of consumers (Carson 112).

One of the first studies to use travel blogs as a market research tool focused on Charleston, South Carolina (Pan, MacLaurin and Crotts). Researchers analyzed 40 blogs found on three popular travel blog sites (www.travelblog.org, www.travelpod.com, www.travelpost.com), as well as three blog search engines. The purpose of the study was to assess visitors’ experiences they communicated with regard to the strengths and weaknesses of Charleston (Pan, MacLaurin and Crotts 36). The study concluded that Charleston’s historic charm, southern hospitality, beaches and waterfront were all strengths; while weaknesses included the weather, infrastructure, and fast service restaurants. However, more important to this study’s purpose, they concluded that “travel blogs can be a useful tool in monitoring the
competitive environment of a destination and provide valuable customer feedback that is richer and more detailed than Likert response survey measurements” (Pan, MacLaurin and Crotts 42).

Carson (2008) conducted a similar study researched Australia’s Northern Territory. Focusing on ‘independent’ blogs that were not obviously commissioned, Carson selected 25 blogs generated from popular blog search engines using the term ‘Northern Territory Australia,’ as well as popular blog sites. The blogs were then content analyzed for “reference to location, activities, transport, products (accommodation, attractions and tours) and events” (Carson 114). The study found that positive moods were more common than negative ones and common topics discussed were “the places and attractions visited, tours and transport, people met, the climate, wildlife and scenery, Aboriginal culture sites, activities undertaken, and meals and accommodation” (Carson 116). However, Carson concluded that the costs of locating relevant blogs and analyzing their content might be too much to assess the attitudes of visitors to a destination. Nonetheless, he recommended destination marketers consider how their destination is represented by blogs and how they could incorporate the medium into their marketing mix (Carson 118).

Recognizing the increased use of travel blogs to exchange information among tourists, Wenger (2008) analyzed the content of 114 blog posts relating to trips to Austria. The purpose of the study was to ‘identify positive and negative perceptions of Austria as a tourism destination’ in order to compare them with other research into Austria’s destination image (Wenger 169). Focusing on blog entries posted to www.travelblog.org, Wenger analyzed 188 blog entries from 144 different blogs. The study found that visits to Austria were typically a side trip from a Central European country, or a transit destination between Central and Eastern Europe; popular destinations for international travelers included Vienna and Salzburg. While Wenger recognized
this market research information helps to show Austria’s destination image, readers would not come away with a well-rounded understanding of Austria (Wenger 175). Wenger even points out the lack of research into how blogs can be used as a part of a marketing communications mix.

**Literature Review Conclusion**

Based on the preceding studies we know that before taking a trip, consumers rely heavily on the Internet to research and plan their travels. During or after a trip, consumers use the Internet to share their experiences, both positive and negative, on review websites, social media platforms, and blogs. In turn other consumers use this consumer generated content to plan for their own trips. DMOs have begun using social media to interact with these consumers; however, they are not yet using it to its full potential. Finally to better inform destination’s marketing messages, researchers have monitored consumer opinions by analyzing blog content.

This study is interested in expanding this previous research by studying how professional travel bloggers use social media platforms for campaigns with DMOs. The following questions were used to address this goal: (1) Which social media platforms are commonly utilized in a travel bloggers campaign? (2) How do travel bloggers use social media? (3) How does each social media platform offer value to the DMO? (4) How does each social media platform offer value to the blog itself? The next section describes the method that was used to answer these questions.
RESEARCH METHOD: CASE STUDY

Research Introduction

In order to answer the research questions for this study, the researcher choose to utilize the case study method. According to Robert Yin, author of *Case Study Research: Design and Methods*, the definition of a case study has two parts:

First, “A case study is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident.”

Second, “The case study inquiry copes with the technically distinctive situation in which there will be many more variables of interest than data points, and as one result relies on multiple sources of evidence, with data needing to converge in a triangulating fashion, and as another result benefits from the prior development of theoretical propositions to guide data collection and analysis” (Yin 18).

The case study method of research has been utilized in a variety of industries, including psychology, business, and education. Its unique attributes have helped to “contribute to our knowledge of individual, group, organizational, social, political, and related phenomena” (Yin 4).

Case Study Method

When considering the case study method, it is important to understand if it is an appropriate method for the research being conducted. Along with experiments and histories, the case study is a favorable research method when the research questions are in the form of “how”
and “why” questions. According to Yin, this is because “such questions deal with operational links needing to be traced over time, rather than mere frequencies or incidence” (Yin 9).

What differentiates case studies from histories is their ability to utilize direct observation of events and interviews of key persons involved; this makes case studies valuable when researching contemporary events (Yin 11). In fact, one of the key strengths of the case study method is the ability to utilize multiple sources of evidence, including documents, artifacts and interviews (Yin 11).

However, case studies do not come without weaknesses. First, there is no set design or procedures to doing a case study. Compared to other research methods, this could lead the investigator to allow “equivocal evidence or biased views to influence the direction of the findings and conclusions” (Yin 14). Another weakness is that case studies are not scientifically generalizable. By this it is meant that the results of a single case cannot be said to be true of an entire population or universe, however case studies can be generalized to “theoretical propositions” (Yin 15).

**Study Design**

Instead of focusing on one travel blog and its accompanying social media content, this study is designed in the format of a multiple-case study. It focuses on the content of two independent travel blogs: a solo male blog and a blog run by a couple. Originally, this study was going to include a solo female blogger as well; however, she had to cancel her interview due to unforeseen circumstances. The object of this study is a specific campaign that each blogger(s) developed with a Destination Marketing Organization (DMO).
The research has chosen to conduct a multiple case study approach in order to make the findings more powerful. Yin suggests having at least two cases should be your goal because, “analytic conclusions independently arising from two cases…are more powerful than those coming from a single case” (Yin 61). This case study takes an embedded approach, meaning it relies on multiple units of analysis (i.e. blog content, interviews, multiple social media platforms). The main sources of evidence utilized are content analysis of blog and social media content and in-depth Skype interviews with each blogger. The purpose of the interviews is to determine each blogger’s social media strategy and to obtain more details about the blogger’s relationship with the DMO involved with the campaign.

**Participant Selection**

This study focuses on independent travel bloggers—those who blog as a full-time job or on the side to supplement their income. Participation was considered based on a pre-determined set of criteria: 1) Each blog must be at least three years old. Many blogs take 6 to 12 months to really begin growing a sizable audience, choosing blogs that have been around for at least three years will help to focus in on professional travel bloggers. 2) Each blog should have a minimum of 70,000 monthly visitors. DMOs partner with travel bloggers to gain exposure, choosing blogs with at least 70,000 monthly visitors should increase the likelihood that the blogger has partnered with a DMO. 3) Each blog must have a newsletter and media kit. The newsletter helps to establish that repeat visitors and the media kit shows the blogger is looking to partner with brands and destinations, both of these criteria were selected to establish the travel blogger as a professional blogger. 4) Each blog must have a Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, and Twitter account, bloggers with a Google+ and/or Pinterest account were given extra consideration. Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, and Twitter were selected because they are commonly used by
travel bloggers, those who also have a Google+ and Pinterest profile would be able to give more insight to social media use. 5) Finally, each blogger must have participated in a campaign with a DMO in the past two years. Two years was chosen to ensure that enough time has gone by for data to accrue without the blogger forgetting too many details of the campaign.

To gain better access to these bloggers, the researcher joined TravelBlogSuccess.com. Travel Blog Success (TBS) is an “online course and community packed with best practices and all the guidance you need to create your own indie travel blog” (“Learn How to Make Money with a Travel Blog”). The TBS community includes 1,000+ members who are or aspire to be independent travel bloggers. Each member has access to a private Facebook group which the primary investigator used to search for participants.

After identifying the top 15 potential participants that met the established criteria, the researcher contacted each blogger through their email address which was listed on their blogs. Once the participants were selected, interview dates were set and the investigator selected the specific DMO campaigns to focus on.

Research Questions

The goal of this study is to determine how professional travel bloggers utilize their social media channels for campaigns with DMOs. To better understand how the bloggers use each social media platform, the following research questions were formulated:

RQ1: Which social media platforms are commonly utilized in a travel bloggers campaigns?

For this question, the bloggers were asked which social media platforms were the DMOs most interested in using. This question focused on both the individual campaign being studied as well as their overall experience working with DMOs. The goal of this question was to find out
which social media platforms are favored by DMOs from the travel blogger’s experience of partnering with them.

**RQ2: How do travel bloggers use social media?**

This question would be used to determine what the blogger’s strategy was with regard to their social media accounts. The social media platforms discussed were Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, Google+, and Pinterest.

**RQ3: How does each social media platform offer value to the blogger’s client (DMO)?**

After establishing which social media platforms DMOs are most interested in and how the blogger chooses to use their social media channels, the next logical question was how those social media platforms offer value to the DMO.

**RQ4: How does each social media platform offer value to the blog itself?**

Finally, it is important to know how each social media platform offers value to the blog and the blogger themselves. While it is not directly related to the campaigns themselves, the bloggers use of social media could relate to their blogs audience size and with a larger audience, the blogger in turn offers more value to the DMO.

**Data Collection**

**Content Analysis:** In order to select which campaign to focus on for each blogger, their media kits were analyzed to find a list of recent campaigns. Once selected, the campaign dates were determined from the published blog posts related to the campaign and then confirmed by the blogger. Social media posts related to the campaign were then found by the campaign dates. For some social media platforms this was done by scrolling through their chronological content.
until the posts were located. For others, tools were used in order to find campaign posts more quickly. For example, the Twitter “Advanced Search” tool was used to reduce the amount of content on Twitter needed to sift through (“Twitter Advanced Search”). The posts were then captured via screen shot and saved for analysis. The types of content analyzed include written blog posts, media kits, engagement on blog posts, social media posts, engagement on social media posts, and statistics related to social media engagement (likes, shares, etc.). The purpose of the content analysis was to determine themes in each bloggers social media use in order to write interview questions.

**Interviews:** After explaining the research to the subjects, receiving general information about the specific campaign, and analyzing campaign content, a Skype interview was scheduled with each blogger. The timing of the interview depended on the blogger’s schedule, as they travel frequently; however, they were informed that the interview had to be completed before March 1, 2015. If they were unable to complete the interview before that date, they would not be included in this study. Once a date and time was selected, the subjects were asked if they had any questions to be answered prior to the interview. The day before their interview, the bloggers were emailed to remind them of their obligation. Prior to the start of the interview, the bloggers were read an informed consent statement to let them know their participation was voluntary and that the interview would be recorded for data collection purposes. After the interview, the conversation was transcribed into a written transcript. Themes between the bloggers’ interview responses, content, and blog engagement are analyzed and reported in the next section.
CASES

Dave and Deb of ThePlanetD.com

Background

The first blog analyzed for this case study is ThePlanetD.com, which was started in 2008 by Dave Bouskill and Debra Corbeil, a couple from Ontario, Canada. With “Adventure is for everyone” as their motto, ThePlanetD focuses on couple and adventure travel (see figure 1). Whether it is kayaking in Antarctica, skydiving in New Zealand, or exploring their home country of Canada, Dave and Deb are always looking for the next big adventure.

Figure 1: ThePlanetD Homepage

According to Deb, they “launched The Planet D without the intention of becoming bloggers” (Bouskill and Corbeil “ThePlanetD Interview”). While working in the film industry, the couple had been taking the winters off to travel since 2000. With a desire to travel more, Dave and Deb began to consider new careers that would allow them to travel. “We considered becoming dive masters, running cycling tours, opening a bar somewhere; we just knew we really wanted to travel” (Bouskill and Corbeil “ThePlanetD Interview”). Finally in 2007, the couple decided to sign up for the Tour d’Afrique, the world’s longest cycling race, which stretches 12,000km from Cairo, Egypt, to Cape Town, South Africa. In fact, the Tour d’Afrique is the reason the couple started The Planet D, because it was part of the race; “they wanted us to put a
blog online so people could follow along and see our progress” (Bouskill and Corbeil “ThePlanetD Interview”).

The race lasted four months and turned out to be a huge success for the couple. Deb ended up winning the women’s title and Dave achieved EFI status, meaning he cycled every inch of the tour without getting a support vehicle and made it to each nightly check-in before the cut-off time (Bouskill and Corbeil “From Trailer Park”). The tour helped them gain publicity as they wrote about their experience for a national newspaper and were able to secure several TV spots; according to Deb, “that’s when we realized blogging was the future, we were like let’s look into this online thing” (Bouskill and Corbeil “ThePlanetD Interview”).

By the time they had returned from Africa, Dave and Deb were broke; “we had just spent a ton of money on our trip to Africa…we had to go back to work for a year” (Bouskill and Corbeil “ThePlanetD Interview”). For the next year, they worked hard to grow their blog as they went back to work to save money. “We had ten years of travel under our belt, so for the year we were working full-time we were building our travel blog with our old travel stories” (Bouskill and Corbeil “ThePlanetD Interview”). Then in October 2009, the couple set out on an adventure to India, however “this time it was for good” (Bouskill and Corbeil “ThePlanetD Interview”). Focusing on their blog, Dave and Deb were able to begin making money while they traveled through partnerships with advertisers (Bouskill and Corbeil “From Trailer Park”).

Nearly six years later, ThePlanetD is now one of the most successful travel blogs. The blog boasts a large audience, with 232,000 monthly pageviews and 150,000 monthly unique visits (Bouskill and Corbeil “ThePlanetD Media Kit”). Besides having a large blog audience, Dave and Deb have also grown a large following on several social media platforms including: Facebook (143,000+ likes), Twitter (102,000+ followers), Google+ (900,000+ followers),
Instagram (25,000+ followers), Pinterest (25,000+ followers), and YouTube (1,500+). Their blog has been featured on many media outlets including The Today Show, Lonely Planet and BBC Travel. In addition to their media coverage, ThePlanetD was recognized as the “Top Travel Blog of 2013” by the Huffington Post, a “2014 Best Travel Instagram Account” by Yahoo Travel, and the Society of American Travel Writers winner of the “2014 Best Travel Blog” (Bouskill and Corbeil “ThePlanetD Media Kit”).

**Strategy when Partnering with DMOs**

When partnering with a Destination Marketing Organization, Dave and Deb tailor their strategy based on the needs of the destination. According to Dave, which social media they use “depends if they are looking for immediate returns or something a little more long-term” (Bouskill and Corbeil “ThePlanetD Interview”). He went on to explain that Twitter can be utilized for immediate returns during the trip, whereas Facebook and Instagram provide a little longer shelf life for the brand. To date, ThePlanetD has sent over 83,900 Tweets, compared to 1,040+ Instagram posts. When you compare these numbers, it makes sense that after a few days a social media user is more likely to come across their Instagram photo than the Tweet.

In order to be able to provide quality campaigns for each of their clients, Dave and Deb work hard to have a balanced social media following across platforms. “We work really hard to have all of our social media equal…we have a large Facebook [audience], a large Twitter [audience], a large Google+ [audience], and now we are working really hard on Instagram,” said Deb (Bouskill and Corbeil “ThePlanetD Interview”). Having a strong following on their social media accounts gives Dave and Deb the flexibility to offer clients different packages of social media use. They realize that some clients might want them to use Twitter, but could care less
about Instagram. While other clients might require them to use Facebook, but don’t care if they send a single Tweet.

When a blogger partners with a destination or brand, there tends to be concern about the blogger’s credibility. To determine how Dave and Deb deal with this concern I asked them how they balance credibility with their readers while maintaining a relationship with their clients. The first thing they do is make sure their clients know that their readers come first. Dave said, “One of the things we always do is put our readers first and that’s something we make clear to all of our sponsors and everybody who we work with” (Bouskill and Corbeil “ThePlanetD Interview”). In addition, Dave expressed that everything they write, whether on the blog or their social media profiles, is their own opinions; he said, “the content that we produce and the social media that we put out there is all based on our own opinions” (Bouskill and Corbeil “ThePlanetD Interview”). Finally, if a partnership doesn’t make sense for their readers, then they will not take it; no matter how much money the brand is offering. An example Deb provided was when Dell computers wanted to partner with them. Deb replied, “Sorry I am an Apple person, it just wouldn’t be right…I don’t know the first thing about Dell computers” (Bouskill and Corbeil “ThePlanetD Interview”).

The Campaign

Dave and Deb’s participation in “The Seven Wonders of Oregon” campaign was chosen for this study. For this campaign Travel Oregon (i.e. Oregon Tourism Commission) partnered with seven bloggers, each of whom covered one of the “Seven Wonders of Oregon.” The Oregon wonders include: Mt. Hood, The Oregon Coast, The Columbia River Gorge, The Painted Hills, Smith Rock, The Wallowas, and Crater Lake (Forsha). Travel Oregon ended up inviting
ThePlanetD to Oregon for five days in March 2014 and assigned them Smith Rock as their Oregon wonder to cover using the hashtag, #TravelOregon.

“We got an invitation from Oregon Tourism. They emailed us and saw our Instagram account and said they would like us to come and take some photos,” said Deb (Bouskill and Corbeil “ThePlanetD Interview”). When asked what social media use was stipulated in their contract, Deb said, “Really they just wanted Instagram. It was about putting photos up on our account, but they also let us take over their Instagram account” (Bouskill and Corbeil “ThePlanetD Interview”). While the client only requested them to use Instagram, Dave and Deb ended up packaging coverage across multiple social media platforms and their blog; “we wrote about it on our blog as well, and used Twitter and Facebook, but it was really an Instagram campaign” (Bouskill and Corbeil “ThePlanetD Interview”).

Blog Posts

Even though Travel Oregon did not require them to write any blog posts, Dave and Deb ended up writing four posts about their time in Oregon; “For us, we think it is always about our blog, because that is where the real long-term value is” (Bouskill and Corbeil “ThePlanetD Interview”). They believe the value is in blog posts because it is “evergreen content,” meaning it will remain relevant for a long time. As people begin to research Oregon as a destination to travel to the blog posts will remain useful for many years, whereas the social media post’s life is fleeting (Bouskill and Corbeil “ThePlanetD Interview”). In addition, the blog posts can continue to be repurposed through social media. However, that is not to say social media does not have its value, Deb added, “social media is a great amplifier and is great for telling a story in the moment, but we really still feel blogging has an impact because that is where the content lives” (Bouskill and Corbeil “ThePlanetD Interview”).
The other added benefit of writing blog posts after their trip to Oregon, was the ability to extend the conversation about Oregon. The first blog post was published on April 11th and focused on the tour they took of the lava tubes in Bend, Oregon. The second blog post was published on April 16th and focused on their stay at the Brasada Ranch Resort in Central Oregon. The third blog post was published on April 24th and focused on a scenic 25-mile cycling tour they took from Sisters, Oregon to Smith Rock. The fourth blog post was published on April 30th and focused on the hike they took to Misery Ridge.

While an Instagram photo does a good job of showcasing the beauty of Smith Rock and the surrounding area, there is a limited depth of information a follower can get from it. Blog posts on the other hand enable a reader to experience the trip to Oregon in more detail. Whether they learn about the geology of Oregon, visualize themselves riding a horse through Oregon trails, or see what it takes to hike to the top of Misery Ridge, blog posts give the reader extra value. However, the reader is not limited to hearing about Dave and Deb’s experiences; they also have the option of sharing their own stories and discuss them with other readers. The best example found from this campaign was on the first blog post discussing the lava tubes. A reader was able to recount her experience in the same lava tubes from forty years earlier:

“40 years ago, (wow really that long ago!) another woman and I took our kids, my 3 and her 4 and one she was babysitting through here. The oldest were 8 and the two youngest were 2, we had one flashlight…we had a wonderful time. The stairs weren’t there at the time, you had to climb down. 8 kids under 8, what a day” (Bouskill and Corbeil “Down and Dirty”).

After she shared her experience with Dave and Deb, they took the time to reply back: “Now that would have been an adventure without the stairs! Very cool that you were there 40 years ago!”

Way to go to have an adventurous spirit all your life!” (Bouskill and Corbeil “ThePlanetD Interview”). Dave and Deb make it a point to respond to many comments they receive on their blog and social media profiles (See table 2).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Blog Post</th>
<th>Reader Comments</th>
<th>Dave/Deb Replies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lava Tubes</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brasada Ranch</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cycling Tour</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Misery Ridge Hike</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Social Media Use**

To find out how Dave and Deb use social media, they were asked about their overall strategy with regard to each social media platform. For them, researching and planning is a key part of their social media strategy. While Dave and Deb created ThePlanetD to share their stories, they expressed that they enjoy hearing their readers’ stories through social media as well.

With regard to Facebook, Dave said “I think Facebook does a really good job of connecting with an audience” (Bouskill and Corbeil “ThePlanetD Interview”). Whether it is to find out more information on a destination or to share a story of their own, contacting Dave and Deb through Facebook messages is popular; in fact Dave said, “I find that we get as many messages in our Facebook inbox as we get comments on our blog posts” (Bouskill and Corbeil “ThePlanetD Interview”). One trend Dave and Deb are starting to notice on Facebook is a rise in interaction with Facebook video. “Videos are interesting you know, because we will put up a photo and get 1,500-2,000 likes, videos don’t get quite as many likes, but they get a lot of views and a lot of comments” (Bouskill and Corbeil “ThePlanetD Interview”). Deb mentioned that they have been on YouTube for years and they just started using Facebook video, however they are getting the same amount of views on Facebook as they are on YouTube.
While Travel Oregon did not require them to post to Facebook, Dave and Deb ended up posting Oregon content on their Facebook profile four times. While the campaign may have an end date, the promotion doesn’t necessarily end then. For example, Dave and Deb’s last Instagram post for the campaign was on April 13; that is until they decided to post a picture from their trip to Oregon on January 2, 2015 (figure 2). When asked about it, Deb said, “and that’s the great thing when you work with somebody the get an ongoing [relationship]. Like Travel Oregon sees we tagged them and are like ‘wow, we are still getting some advertising out of ThePlanetD after working with them a year ago” (Bouskill and Corbeil “ThePlanetD Interview”). For the “Seven Wonders of Oregon” campaign, Facebook posts with photos received significantly more shares and comments than posts with a link to their blog (see table 3).

![Figure 2: January 2, 2015 Facebook Post](image)

### Table 3: Dave and Deb’s “Seven Wonders of Oregon” Facebook Post Engagement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Post</th>
<th>Content</th>
<th># of Likes</th>
<th># of Shares</th>
<th># of Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>April 30: Sun Star</td>
<td>Photo</td>
<td>595</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 30: Misery Rock</td>
<td>Blog Post</td>
<td>451</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 1: Spectacular View</td>
<td>Photo</td>
<td>343</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January 2: The Sun</td>
<td>Photo</td>
<td>2,094</td>
<td>142</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

With regard to Twitter, Deb said, “We do post consistently throughout the day, every hour to promote our own posts so that when people come to our Twitter account they see something from ThePlanetD there” (Bouskill and Corbeil “ThePlanetD Interview”). Dave said Dave and Deb have been using Twitter with a high frequency of Tweets since the beginning of ThePlanetD. Since a lot of people are tweeting throughout the day, the feed moves faster than
Facebook’s or Instagram’s. With the high turnover of the Twitter feed, Dave and Deb are able to Tweet often without annoying their fans.

Beyond posting links to their blog posts, Dave said, “Twitter is sort of the place we go to have conversations with our audience” (Bouskill and Corbeil “ThePlanetD Interview”). While they mentioned they can also use Facebook or even their blog to have a conversation with their readers, they said they valued the ability to have a conversation with many people at once on Twitter. An example of these Twitter conversations is when they host a Twitter Chat (sometimes referred to as a TweetChat). Forbes defines a TweetChat as:

“A live Twitter event, usually moderated and focused around a general topic. To filter all the chatter on Twitter into a single conversation a hashtag is used. A set time is also established so that the moderator, guest or host is available to engage in the conversation” (Cooper).

By hosting twitter chats, Dave and Deb are able to promote their Twitter page to a large audience and establish their credibility as travel experts.

One trend noticed when analyzing their Tweets from the Travel Oregon campaign is that they would Tweet their blog posts several times over the course of a few days. When asked about the strategy behind this Dave said, “Yeah, we spread it out over the day, because people who are on Twitter at nine o’clock in the morning may not be on at nine o’clock at night. So you know, we want to reach all of our audience not just part of it” (Bouskill and Corbeil “ThePlanetD Interview”). Another reason for spreading Tweets out over the day is the nature of their audience. As travel bloggers, instead of just Tweeting to a North American audience, Dave and Deb are Tweeting to a global audience. In their media kit they break down their audience’s geographic location which includes United States (53%), Canada (15%), United Kingdom
(10%), Australia (10%) and other (12%). For the Travel Oregon campaign, Tweets with blog post links did not necessarily lead to more engagement. Looking at table 4, notice that Dave and Deb Tweeted the “Misery Ridge” post the least out of all of their Oregon posts, however it received the most engagement.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Blog Post</th>
<th># of Tweets</th>
<th># of Retweets</th>
<th># of Favorites</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lava Tubes</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brasada Ranch</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cycling Tour</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Misery Ridge</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

According to Dave and Deb, “in order to be successful in any social media channel you have to stand out a little bit” (Bouskill and Corbeil “ThePlanetD Interview”). So when it came to Instagram, their strategy was to create their own photography style. Their goal is to have people want to come to their Instagram profile looking for that “specialized kind of image.” One key point that Dave pointed out was that users are on Instagram to see the photos, which means users are actively seeking out the photos. Whereas, there is a number of reasons people spend time on Facebook and Twitter.

In order to amplify the reach on Instagram, Dave and Deb include several hashtags with their posts; according to Dave, “the success of a post depends on how many people are actually seeing it and by using the hashtags it puts your photo in front of more people” (Bouskill and Corbeil “ThePlanetD Interview”). Beyond just using hashtags, Dave and Deb research which hashtags are associated with top Instagram accounts who share other accounts’ content. They do this in an attempt to have their content shared by larger accounts.

Instagram was used in two ways for the Travel Oregon campaign, posting photos to their own account using #TravelOregon, as well as posting photos to the TravelOregon account as a part of an Instagram takeover (see figure 3). An Instagram takeover is when a brand gives
someone else, in this case Dave and Deb, a unique password to access and post to the brands Instagram account. Deb believes that Instagram takeover benefited Travel Oregon in a couple ways. First, they were able to show a new perspective of the destination. She said, “they see their destination in one way, but when we come, we see it in a completely different way” (Bouskill and Corbeil “ThePlanetD Interview”). Second, “in the seven weeks that they had those different instagammers come, [Travel Oregon] built their traffic and interest like crazy” (Bouskill and Corbeil “ThePlanetD Interview”). Table 5 shows engagement rates for the Instagram posts on both ThePlanetD account and the Travel Oregon account.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th># of Likes</th>
<th># of Comments</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th># of Likes</th>
<th># of Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3/21/14</td>
<td>194</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3/27/14</td>
<td>1,095</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3/27/14</td>
<td>539</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>3/28/14</td>
<td>630</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3/27/14</td>
<td>459</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>3/28/14</td>
<td>739</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3/28/14</td>
<td>425</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>3/29/14</td>
<td>1,038</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3/28/14</td>
<td>454</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>3/29/14</td>
<td>688</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3/29/14</td>
<td>468</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>3/30/14</td>
<td>697</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3/29/14</td>
<td>549</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>3/30/14</td>
<td>740</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3/30/14</td>
<td>350</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>3/31/14</td>
<td>1,037</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3/30/14</td>
<td>345</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>3/31/14</td>
<td>678</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3/31/14</td>
<td>502</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>3/31/14</td>
<td>1,229</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3/31/14</td>
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<td>25</td>
<td>3/31/14</td>
<td>849</td>
<td>18</td>
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<tr>
<td>4/1/14</td>
<td>424</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>4/1/14</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4/1/14</td>
<td>236</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>4/1/14</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4/3/14</td>
<td>453</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>4/3/14</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4/12/14</td>
<td>507</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>4/12/14</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4/13/14</td>
<td>591</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>4/13/14</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1/2/15</td>
<td>1,633</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>1/2/15</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>8,473</td>
<td>519</td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>9,420</td>
<td>376</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
While not everyone uses Google+, Dave and Deb have been able to find a lot of success on the social media platform. As it turns out, they claim their success on Google+ came with Dave’s strategy and a bit of luck; according to Deb, “Dave did it obviously the way Google liked it, because they put him on the ‘Suggested G’s’ early on which was great because they didn’t put a lot of travelers on there” (Bouskill and Corbeil “ThePlanetD Interview”). Prior to becoming a “Suggested G” (i.e. a suggested user), Dave had organically grown his Google+ page to 50,000 followers. While it ended up helping to grow their audience to the 900,000+ followers they have today, becoming suggested does not help much with interaction. Dave said, “It’s great to begin your followers but then you have to work hard for interaction” (Bouskill and Corbeil “ThePlanetD Interview”).

To find out their how they use Google+ for ThePlanetD I asked them to tell me their strategy when posting to Google+. Dave is the one who runs the Google+ page, which he uses to showcase his photography. However, the real value to ThePlanetD in using Google+ is how it effects their placement in search results. By having an active audience in Google+, Deb said it helps their ranking on Google's search results. As for traffic coming directly from Google+, people are coming to their blog through Google+ just not nearly as much as Facebook or Twitter.

When it comes to campaigns, Dave and Deb mentioned that they haven’t had a destination ask them to use Google+ before. However, they do end up using it as a part of their packages, in which they will share a few images. Sometimes they include links to blog posts, but mainly the focus is photography. Between March 27 and May 1 Dave ended up posting five photos from Oregon to the Google+ page; some of which ended up doing really well with regard to interaction (see table 6).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Post</th>
<th># of +1’s</th>
<th># of Shares</th>
<th># of Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>March 27: First Post</td>
<td>137</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 1: Beauty of Smith Rock</td>
<td>185</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 28: Sun Star</td>
<td>1,317</td>
<td>153</td>
<td>118</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 30: Reflections</td>
<td>194</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 1: Sun Kissed</td>
<td>1,309</td>
<td>134</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Similar to their experience with Google+, Dave and Deb felt they were lucky to have a few of their Pinterest boards featured. Deb said, “Once again, we got really lucky on Pinterest and I think it’s because we have really good content visually” (Bouskill and Corbeil “ThePlanetD Interview”). However, compared to other platforms, Pinterest is not one that Dave and Deb fully understand or enjoy. Deb said, “I love answering my Facebook messages in the morning. I love putting up and tracking on Instagram. Pinterest I kind of go, ‘oh that’s nice.’ I do the work I have to do then I move on, but I don’t love it” (Bouskill and Corbeil “ThePlanetD Interview”).

In fact, instead of taking the time to research the best practices of Pinterest, Dave and Deb hired someone to optimize their Pinterest boards. Dave explained, “It all comes down to how much time we want to put in versus the benefit we are going to get out” (Bouskill and Corbeil “ThePlanetD Interview”). While some travel bloggers see a lot of traffic coming from their Pinterest page, Dave and Deb haven’t seen the same results. Deb said, “We don’t see the click-through that other people claim they see, but we are working on that” (Bouskill and Corbeil “ThePlanetD Interview”).

Like Google+, when it comes to campaigns, destinations haven’t asked for them to use Pinterest. Dave said, “we have never had someone say, ‘we need X amount of posts on Pinterest,’ it seems to be the thing that brands we are working with don’t care about” (Bouskill
and Corbeil “ThePlanetD Interview”). With regard to the Travel Oregon campaign, no Pins could be found related to Oregon.

With backgrounds in the film industry, Dave and Deb have been on YouTube longer than they have been blogging; according to Deb, “we started out on Youtube before we even had our travel blog, because that was our background” (Bouskill and Corbeil “ThePlanetD Interview”). Out of all of their social media platforms, their YouTube channel has the smallest audience with around 1,500 subscribers; in total their videos have been viewed over 650,000 times (Bouskill and Corbeil “ThePlanetD Media Kit”). While it isn’t where they would like it, Dave and Deb are working to grow their YouTube channel; according to Deb, “I just haven’t gotten my handle on YouTube yet” (Bouskill and Corbeil “ThePlanetD Interview”).

Even with their YouTube audience size, video is in high demand when working with destinations. Deb said, “We get paid well by tourism boards to make good quality videos,” said Deb (Bouskill and Corbeil “ThePlanetD Interview”). With regard to their strategy, Dave and Deb think it has to do with how consistently you post. While they stopped using YouTube for a bit, Dave and Deb have decided to try and post one video each week to build their audience. While they did not utilize YouTube for the Travel Oregon campaign, Dave and Deb expect YouTube to become one of the most important social media platforms for their blog moving forward.

**Adam of TravelsofAdam.com**

**Background**

The second blog analyzed as a part of this case study is TravelsofAdam.com, which was started in 2009 by Adam Groffman, an American blogger who now lives in Berlin, Germany. Adam’s travel blog focuses on two niches, hipster and LGBT travel. Since the summer of 2011, Adam has lived in Berlin working for several companies with his roles related to online
marketing work and graphic design. Using Berlin as his home base, Adam travels around Europe and the rest of the world (Groffman “My Berlin Story”). Since he started his blog, Adam has created eleven “Hipster City Guides” for cities including ones for Berlin, Rome, and Toronto (Groffman “Hipster City Guides”).

Figure 4: Travels of Adam Homepage

Prior to starting Travels of Adam, Adam was a graphic designer at a book publisher in Boston, Massachusetts. According to his blog, Adam started working two weeks before he had even graduated from university and in his own words, “I spent most of my early 20s busy making a career and being responsible” (Groffman “About Travels of Adam”). It was on a weekend trip in September 2009 to Reykjavik, Iceland, when Adam decided he wanted to travel more; “when I came back I decided to start a blog and begin saving money so I could take more trips and travel” (Groffman “Travels of Adam Interview”). According to Adam, “I basically started the blog to learn new skills…I wanted to learn more web design, online marketing, and how to do things with social media” (Groffman “Travels of Adam Interview”). Eventually, Adam tried to transfer to one of his companies’ international offices, however after nine months of trying it didn’t work out.

Then in May 2010, Adam took a leap of faith. He quit his job and left for a 15-month “Round the World” trip that would take him to many countries including Italy, Egypt, Croatia, Nepal, Thailand, and Australia (Groffman “My Tentative Itinerary”). He said, “During that trip I
was blogging for the sake of having something to do, because I felt guilty quitting my job in the middle of the recession in the United States.” In addition to “having something to do,” Adam said he was blogging to continue developing new skills and have something about the trip for his resume (Groffman “Travels of Adam Interview”).

From there, Travels of Adam “just grew and grew and grew” (Groffman “Travels of Adam Interview”). Today Adam’s blog receives over 130,000 monthly pageviews and 80,000 monthly unique visits (Groffman “March 2015 Media Kit”). Adam also has a strong social media presence with a combined 35,000+ followers including: Facebook (8,000+ likes), Twitter (17,000+ followers), Google+ (4,000+ followers), Instagram (4,000+ followers), Pinterest (3,000+ followers), and YouTube (200+). His blog has been featured on media outlets including The Huffington Post and Business Insider. His blog was a finalist for the “Best LGBT Blog” by the 2013 Weblog Awards and like Dave and Deb, was a “2014 Best Travel Instagram Account” by Yahoo Travel (Groffman “March 2015 Media Kit”).

**Strategy when Partnering with DMOs**

When it comes to campaigns, Adam takes his social media approach differently from Dave and Deb. Instead of taking a strategic approach to his social media use, Adam prefers to take an organic approach. He said, “I never include social media usage [in contracts], because I feel like it should be a little more organic” (Groffman “Travels of Adam Interview”). Instead of scheduling his social media posts, Adam said he does it all in the moment from his phone. “The way I use social media for my blog, I do it all from my phone, so it’s in real time. Nothing gets planned or scheduled in advance” (Groffman “Travels of Adam Interview”). This does not mean Adam doesn’t use social media for his campaigns, it just means he decides how often to use
them. He said, “they don’t usually specify how much, they just say you need to use this hashtag” (Groffman “Travels of Adam Interview”).

Adam takes several steps to ensure he remains credible while working with destinations. First, he makes sure to research a destination before being paid to travel there because he wants to make sure he will be able to write content that his audience will value. He said, “I wanted to make sure I was comfortable with the destination before I went, so I did a lot of research beforehand” (Groffman “Travels of Adam Interview”). The second thing he does is makes sure the campaign contract is structured so he can work in complete independence and write what he wants. When he travels he said he does so “without having an itinerary from the destination, being told to go here, eat this or do that” (Groffman “Travels of Adam Interview”). This can end up putting more work on Adam, however he believes doing so “makes the content more interesting, useful and successful” (Groffman “Travels of Adam Interview”).

The Campaign

Adam’s participation in the “#TasteLjubljana” campaign was chosen for this study. Similarly to ThePlanetD’s partnership with Travel Oregon, the #TasteLjubljana campaign involved multiple bloggers. The campaign was a partnership between Visit Ljubljana (i.e. Ljubljana Tourism) and The Travel Mob, who according to their website are “a team of leading bloggers, photographers, vloggers/filmmakers and travel journalists, off to explore the world together” (“The Travel Mob”). A key difference from the Travel Oregon campaign is that The Travel Mob visited Ljubljana (Slovenia) all at once, rather than visiting one at a time over the course of a couple weeks.

To start off our interview, Adam was asked about the idea behind The Travel Mob. He said, “the idea was to get five or six bloggers to visit a destination, work with local bloggers in
the destination to then write content that was already planned and researched” (Groffman “Travels of Adam Interview”). Each blogger was to promote Ljubljana on each of their blogs and contribute to the creation of a free downloadable destination guide that would go onto the Travel Mob’s website (see figure 5).

Figure 5: The Travel Mob Homepage

Working with a group of bloggers was a new experience for Adam, who typically works with destinations individually. He said, “this was my first time working on a bigger group project…I almost always work independently” (Groffman “Travels of Adam Interview”). Adam became involved with The Travel Mob when he was approached by Duncan Rhoades, who runs his own travel blog called the Urban Travel Blog. Adam said that Duncan was “interested in getting a group of bloggers together to work on a new way to promote a destination” (Groffman “Travels of Adam Interview”). While a majority of the campaign planning was Duncan’s responsibility, Adam was involved with setting rates and determining how much work the bloggers would provide. Adam added that “generally I like to be in charge of things, but for this I did not want to be in charge, because the organization of it seemed challenging” (Groffman “Travels of Adam Interview”).

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When it came to what deliverables the bloggers would offer, Adam said they had outlined minimum achievements in the campaign proposal. He said, “we had planned lots of stats to say what we would do. So it was very numerical, how many tweets, and how many Facebook posts, how many blog stories” (Groffman “Travels of Adam Interview”). As for the social media use, there were requirements in place with regard to using the #TasteLjubljana hashtag on Facebook and Twitter, which for Adam included sending “fifty tweets over five days or something” (Groffman “Travels of Adam Interview”). At first Adam was uncomfortable with agreeing to use social media a certain number of times, but while traveling he found it easy to meet the requirements. Discussing the campaign as a whole, Adam said, “Ultimately I thought it was a good campaign and a decent process as well. We all worked well together, because I knew most of the people beforehand” (Groffman “Travels of Adam Interview”).

**Blog Posts**

Each blogger was required to write blog posts about Ljubljana. Adam’s requirement was to publish four blog posts while promoting the destination on his social media accounts using the hashtag #TasteLjubljana. Since Adam had never been to Ljubljana he made sure to do a lot of research prior to the trip. He said, “in order to make sure it was a destination I felt comfortable writing about I did a lot of research and found story ideas. I knew food was a focus the destination wanted to promote…so I researched Slovenian cuisine, and came up with an idea for what I wanted to write about” (Groffman “Travels of Adam Interview”).

After researching the destination, Adam pitched the destination on the ideas he had for his blog posts. He told them he would write about, “alternative cool things to do…food in Ljubljana…and then a photo essay” (Groffman “Travels of Adam Interview”). For the fourth post, Adam had originally planned on writing about a bike tour he had heard about. However,
Adam said, “I didn’t even end up writing that, because while I was there the stories I found were different than the original ones I had suggested, which was understandable and expected” (Groffman “Travels of Adam Interview”).

The first blog post was published on July 14th and focused on six reasons Ljubljana relates to Berlin. The second blog post was a street art photo essay and was published on July 16th. The third blog post was published on July 30th and focused on the six best meals Adam had in Ljubljana. The fourth blog post Adam wrote was posted on his second blog, MyGayTravelGuide.com; the post was published on July 30th under the title, “Ljubljana is for Lovers! A Gay Guide to Europe’s Undiscovered City” (Groffman “Ljubljana for Lovers”). Additionally, Adam created a “Hipster City Guide” for Ljubljana, which highlights things to do and where to stay among other travel tips (Groffman “Ljubljana City Guide”). When it comes to engagement, the blog post relating Ljubljana to Berlin received the most comments (see table 7).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 7: Adam’s “Taste Ljubljana” Blog Post Engagement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Blog Post</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ljubljana / Berlin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Photo Essay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ljubljana Meals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>City Guide</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ljubljana for Lovers</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Social Media Use**

With Adam taking an organic approach to social media, he was first asked what his strategy is with Facebook. Adam tends to only post his own content on his Facebook page. He said, “On Facebook I pretty much share photos and links to my own blog” (Groffman “Travels of Adam Interview”). Adam also discussed how his personality plays a role in the content he shares, joking “my blog is called Travels of Adam, so I definitely play up to the fact that I am Adam” (Groffman “Travels of Adam Interview”). Adam also said the best traffic from Facebook
happens when, “articles of mine get shared by other, more dedicated Facebook pages” (Groffman “Travels of Adam Interview”). Most of the time this happens when it is someone organically sharing Adams post; however, from time to time Adam will do outreach to these Facebook pages by sending them a private message or email.

Adam only posted to Facebook twice for the #TasteLjubljana campaign. The first post was on June 25th when he had just arrived in Ljubljana. In it he announced the campaign telling his fans to check out the hashtag #TasteLjubljana on Twitter. He also asked his fans that have been to Ljubljana before to give him recommendations of things to do, which he said he would post to his Pinterest profile. The second post was an Instagram photo of a bridge in Ljubljana which was on June 29, 2015 (see table 8 for Facebook post engagement).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 8: Adam’s “Taste Ljubljana” Facebook Post Engagement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Post</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 25: Announcement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 29: Bridge</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Before Adam started the blog, Travels of Adam, he started the Twitter account @TravelsofAdam. Originally, he used the account to share about travel in general, but as it grew he realized he needed another way to share his stories. He said, “as it became a bigger and bigger interest, I moved it into a blog and started blogging about planning to travel and then traveling” (Groffman “Travels of Adam Interview”). Today, Adam uses @TravelsofAdam for his blog and Twitter has become his favorite platform; his reasons are because, “I enjoy [Twitter] the most and because I get the most fun and interesting interactions” (Groffman “Travels of Adam Interview”).

Like Dave and Deb, Adam has also participated in Twitter Chats; however, he doesn’t actively look for or participate in them. Beyond participating, Adam has hosted a Twitter Chat as
well. He said, “I did run a Twitter Chat in partnership with Lonely Planet last year. That was something we both promoted and it was just Lonely Planet and myself. It was a very intense hour” (Groffman “Travels of Adam Interview”). Whether or not Adam will host a Twitter Chat typically depends on the topic and compensation he receives. He said, “If it is an acceptable rate and a topic that relates to my own interests or what I cover, then I am usually happy to participate” (Groffman “Travels of Adam Interview”).

When tweeting for the campaign, Adam made sure to include the #TasteLjubljana hashtag in each Tweet (see figure 6). In addition to using the hashtag in his Tweets, Adam used the hashtag to start conversations. He said, “I also search the hashtag and try to interact with other people using the hashtag” (Groffman “Travels of Adam Interview”). From June 19th – June 30th, Adam sent 21 tweets using the #TasteLjubljana hashtag. In total, these Tweets received 35 retweets and 53 favorites. After the campaign was over, Adam wrote his blog posts and tweeted the links to his Twitter followers. Out of the four blog links Tweeted, the Ljubljana City Guide received the most engagement (see table 9).

| Table 9: Adam’s “Taste Ljubljana” Blog Post Twitter Engagement |
|------------------|------------------|------------------|
| Blog Post        | # of Tweets      | # of Retweets    | # of Favorites |
| Ljubljana / Berlin | 3                | 6                | 4              |
| Photo Essay      | 3                | 0                | 1              |
| Ljubljana Meals  | 2                | 8                | 5              |
| City Guide       | 2                | 22               | 35             |

Adam believes Instagram is the “strongest tool for destination marketing organizations” (Groffman “Travels of Adam Interview”). With Instagram users focus their attention on the visuals as they are the reason people use Instagram. When it comes to the types of visuals Adam
shares on Instagram, he said “generic scenic photos, like city skylines, sunsets, or whatever” (Groffman “Travels of Adam Interview”). However, he also tries to mix his personality with his posts. He said, “I tend to mix in a little more personality, maybe a selfie or you know a meal, or other smaller details from a trip, not just ‘look how beautiful Amsterdam is’ but ‘look how delicious this apple pie in Amsterdam is’” (Groffman “Travels of Adam Interview”).

For the #TasteLjubljana campaign, Adam posted to Instagram 13 times from June 25th to June 29th. Of the posts, five were of food/beverage during his meals, five were scenic and one was a selfie (figure 7). Table 10 shows the level of engagement Adam received on each of his Instagram posts.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th># of Likes</th>
<th># of Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6/25/14</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6/25/14</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6/25/14</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6/26/14</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6/26/14</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6/27/14</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6/27/14</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6/27/14</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6/27/14</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6/28/14</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6/28/14</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6/29/14</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6/29/14</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

While Adam has over 4,000 followers on Google+, it is not a social media platform he uses heavily. Adam’s use of Google+ involves occasionally sharing links to his blog posts. However, Adam does not put a lot of effort into his Google+ profile because he does not believe
his target audience uses it much. Instead, Adam focuses on his Facebook and Twitter accounts where it is easier to get “stronger shares that actually drive click-throughs” (Groffman “Travels of Adam Interview”). Adam did end up using Google+ to promote his blog posts for the #TasteLjubljana campaign. He posted to Google+ three times for the campaign, which received little to no engagement (“TravelsofAdam Google+ Page”). Table 11 shows Adam’s #Taste Ljubljana Google+ posts, which received low engagement.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Post</th>
<th># of +1’s</th>
<th># of Shares</th>
<th># of Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>July 27: Berlin Post</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 16: Street Art</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 29: City Guide</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Adam uses Pinterest for his blog in several ways. Prior to traveling to a destination Adam reaches out to his followers on Facebook and Twitter for travel tips. He then takes those recommendations and saves them to a Pinterest Board he created for the destination. The other way Adam uses Pinterest is to share his own content. The board he created for Ljubljana was called “Ljubljana Travel Tips” and has 14 Pins and 1,600+ followers (figure 8). Of the 14 Pins on the Ljubljana, only one linked back to his blog (“TravelsofAdam Pinterest Page”).

Adam believes YouTube is one of the biggest opportunities for travel bloggers. He said, “YouTube is definitely the future. I mean YouTube has been around for a while, but as far as blogging and social media, YouTube should be a priority” (Groffman “Travels of Adam Interview”).
Even though he praised YouTube as the future, Adam admits he hasn’t used it in a while. Looking at the Travels of Adam YouTube page, the last video he uploaded was on December 30, 2013 (“TravelsofAdam YouTube Page”). The main reason Adam stopped uploading videos to his YouTube channel is because of the process involved with creating the video. He said, “it is all edited by myself and often it is a bit exhausting and not where my interests lie” (Groffman “Travels of Adam Interview”).

In addition to the general travel videos Adam posted to his YouTube channel, he also created a channel to vlog. Adam only ran the vlog for a short period of time as he realized it would be too much work. He said, “I tried to do a video three times a week or something, which was quickly exhausting. But I learned a lot and I got to see what professional YouTubers have to do and it made me realize I just don’t have the time to do that and a blog” (Groffman “Travels of Adam Interview”).
FINDINGS

Dave and Deb Summary

Dave and Deb began blogging in 2008, when they created ThePlanetD to track their progress while cycling through Africa as a part of the Tour d’Afrique. Focusing on couple and adventure travel, ThePlanetD is one of the most successful travel blogs on the internet. Today they receive 232,000 monthly pageviews and boast large followings on each of their social media channels.

This study focused on the “The Seven Wonders of Oregon” campaign. For this campaign, Travel Oregon partnered with seven travel bloggers, who were each invited to Oregon to cover one of the seven wonders. Travel Oregon assigned Dave and Deb the Smith Rock wonder, which they covered in March/April of 2014. Dave and Deb were only required to promote the destination on Instagram using the hashtag #TravelOregon (both on their profile and on Travel Oregon’s profile, as part of an Instagram takeover); however, they ended up writing several blog posts and using multiple social media platforms for the campaign.

Adam Summary

Adam began blogging in 2009, when he created Travels of Adam to share his travel experiences while learning new skills. Focusing on hipster and LGBT travel, Adam has built a significant audience. Today, Travels of Adam receives 130,000 monthly pageviews to go with a combined 35,000+ followers on social media.

This study focused on the “#TasteLjubljana” campaign. For this campaign, Visit Ljubljana partnered with Adam and a group of travel bloggers called “The Travel Mob.” One key difference between the Travel Oregon campaign Dave and Deb participated in is that for
“#TasteLjubljana” the group of bloggers all visited at once. Adam’s contribution was writing several blog posts while promoting Ljubljana on his social media channels.

**Research Questions**

**RQ1: Which social media platforms are commonly utilized in a travel bloggers campaigns?**

According to Deb, Twitter is the social media platform most commonly requested by DMOs; she said, “mostly I think people want Twitter” (Bouskill and Corbeil “ThePlanetD Interview”). In his experience, Adam said, along with Facebook, Twitter is most commonly requested. Interestingly enough, both bloggers believe Instagram is gaining in popularity due to its visual nature. Another type of visual content that is popular among DMOs is the use of video. Deb said that video is “almost always a part of our package,” while Adam said “a lot of times now it’s one of the first questions they ask, ‘Do you do video?’ And that’s because I think destinations and brands are looking for more exposure through video” (Groffman “Travels of Adam Interview”). With that said, Dave and Deb believe that YouTube will be one of the most important social media channels going forward. Adam on the other hand said that “YouTube is definitely the future” (Groffman “Travels of Adam Interview”). At the other end of the spectrum, both bloggers agreed the platforms their clients request the least are Google + and Pinterest.

**RQ2: How do travel bloggers use social media?**

To find out how they use their social media profiles, both bloggers were asked their strategy when using each social media platform. Interestingly enough, the two bloggers use social media in completely different ways. Dave and Deb follow a strategic/planned approach, which involves research and scheduling their posts. When it comes to campaigns, they determine
what social media channels will do best for the destination and package them together in the contract.

Adam uses an organic approach, where he updates his social media in real-time from his phone. He said, “the way I use social media for my blog, I do it all from my phone, so it’s in real time. Nothing gets planned or scheduled in advance” (Groffman “Travels of Adam Interview”). Usually, this means the amount he uses his social media profiles for campaigns is entirely based on him; he said, “they don’t usually specify how much, they just say you need to use this hashtag” (Groffman “Travels of Adam Interview”).

For Facebook, Dave and Deb research how to optimize their posts to reach the most people and receive the most engagement. This includes researching what types of posts work best at which times for their audience. “We’ve done a lot of research into what [content] works at what time,” said Dave. Examples he gave for his audience specifically were that photos do well in the morning and blog posts do well in the afternoon (Bouskill and Corbeil “ThePlanetD Interview”). One thing they always try and include in their Facebook posts is a “Call to Action” (CTA), such as posing a question for their fans. This is because they think Facebook is “the place where people can really interact and show their travels…everybody loves to say where they have been and what they have done” (Bouskill and Corbeil “ThePlanetD Interview”). An example they gave was posting a picture of the Trevi Fountain with the question, “Have you been to Rome and seen the Trevi Fountain?” Then readers can respond saying, “I was just there last month” (Bouskill and Corbeil “ThePlanetD Interview”). These CTAs encourage fans to share their own stories and engage with the post.

Adam prefers to only post his own content on his Facebook page, whether that is his photographs or his blog posts. He said, “On Facebook I pretty much share photos and links to my
own blog” (Groffman “Travels of Adam Interview”). While he may post links to other websites from time to time, Adam finds that “the most engagement comes from highly personal updates” (Groffman “Travels of Adam Interview”). Beyond engagement on their posts, both bloggers receive messages from their fans on their Facebook page. Adam said, “I get a lot of private Facebook messages on the page, usually people asking me specific travel questions” (Groffman “Travels of Adam Interview”). In order to build a stronger relationship with their fans they try to reply to all messages in a timely manner.

For Twitter, Dave and Deb are comfortable posting at a high frequency. Deb said, “Our followers expect us to Tweet a lot, we host Twitter Chats, like we did today, and they expect 100 tweets in an hour and nobody really minds” (Bouskill and Corbeil “ThePlanetD Interview”). With the Twitter Feed’s fast turnover, they are able to Tweet as much as they like without bothering their followers. One tactic they use with Twitter is to Tweet out links to their blog posts several times over the course of a few days; strategically posting at different times, to ensure people in each time zone can see the post. Dave and Deb stressed that by Tweeting their own content, rather than amplifying other peoples content, that Twitter is “a big driver of traffic [to their blog]” (Bouskill and Corbeil “ThePlanetD Interview”). When Adam is traveling to a destination, he uses Twitter in several ways. Prior to a trip he seeks advice from his followers, during his trip he shares his experiences at the destination, and following his trip he promotes the destination by tweeting links to his blog posts.

Both bloggers have hosted Twitter Chats and participate in them from time to time. Dave and Deb discussed two reasons why Twitter Chats are beneficial. First, it levels the playing field to where follower numbers don’t matter. Deb said, “It lets new people introduce themselves to you and chat away…you know because I am not sitting there looking at who I am talking to and
going, ‘oh you know, do they have 100,000 followers, I’m not going to talk to you.’” The second benefit of hosting Twitter Chats is that it helps to strengthen Dave and Deb’s credibility as a travel authority (Bouskill and Corbeil “ThePlanetD Interview”). With regard to his participation in Twitter Chats, Adam said, “It may be like once a month, I participate for twenty minutes and that’s enough” (Groffman “Travels of Adam Interview”).

For Instagram, Dave and Deb have created their own photography style which they keep consistent for each of their Instagram posts; Dave described it as, “a little heavier saturated color, maybe more of an artistic look” (Bouskill and Corbeil “ThePlanetD Interview”). One tactic they use is adding several relevant hashtags with their Instagram posts. Using hashtags on Instagram is different from using hashtags on Twitter. On Twitter, hashtags are included in the Tweet. Not only does this take up characters, but it is also a turnoff for many followers. On Instagram however, you can separate the hashtags from the post and include them as a comment; according to Dave and Deb, Instagram users don’t mind when they use upwards of 20 hashtags as a single comment (Bouskill and Corbeil “ThePlanetD Interview”). They pick the hashtags through intensive research, specifically looking for hashtags that will get their posts shared by larger accounts. By using these hashtags the top accounts will “potentially feature you, showcasing your photo and your account to a whole different set of users” (Bouskill and Corbeil “ThePlanetD Interview”). Dave and Deb have seen good results from being featured before, stating “you suddenly find you will get a thousand followers a day out of it if a big guy featured you” (Bouskill and Corbeil “ThePlanetD Interview”).

When posting to Instagram, Adam on the other hand does not include many hashtags; usually only including hashtags required for the campaign. He said, “I don’t usually go in and add twenty other hashtags related to the city or destination [in a comment]” (Groffman “Travels
of Adam Interview”). However, one tool he uses for his Instagram strategy is the geo-tagging feature to interact with locals. He said, “I geotag as many of my photos as I can and often go into this location in the geotag and look at the previous five or ten photos and I try to interact with some of those” (Groffman “Travels of Adam Interview”). According to Adam:

> “Those are often locals and it’s just good to interact with other local Instagrammers while you are in a foreign place because then they might return to your Instagram and interact with you and as a traveler I find that useful” (Groffman “Travels of Adam Interview”).

Doing this, Adam has not only grown his audience, but he has also received many travel tips from locals. He said, “as a traveler it’s useful and as a brand you are engaging with people who are already advocates for the destination, which can help to propel [content] further” (Groffman “Travels of Adam Interview”).

For Google+, Dave’s strategy relies on quality and consistency, trying to post once a day. Dave said, “my strategy really has just been to put up the best images possible” (Bouskill and Corbeil “ThePlanetD Interview”). One thing Dave does to boost his interactions is to get involved in Google+ communities he said, “you really want to be able to boost those interactions and that’s where communities really come in” (Bouskill and Corbeil “ThePlanetD Interview”). Google+ communities are groups that can be, either public or private, where people can join to discuss common interests and share content with one another (“Features – Google+”). By joining and commenting on communities, Dave is able to extend his Google+ presence which helps to drive interaction on his content. Adam, however, does not use Google+ that much. He said, “I don’t dislike Google+, it’s just not a huge focus for my blog” (Groffman “Travels of Adam Interview”). The main reason he doesn’t focus on Google+ is because he doesn’t believe it is
used much by his audience. He said, “I don’t think my audience is active on it as much as other places” (Groffman “Travels of Adam Interview”).

For Pinterest, one thing Dave and Deb are doing to improve their results is writing more on each Pin and trying to include a Call to Action. Deb said, “we’ve seen the growth since we started more pins with writing on them, you want to do that ‘Call to Action,’ which we didn’t do for the longest time” (Bouskill and Corbeil “ThePlanetD Interview”). In the last two months they have seen 50-75% boost in traffic coming from Pinterest; however, Deb added “the traffic wasn’t big to begin with” (Bouskill and Corbeil “ThePlanetD Interview”).

Adam uses Pinterest in two ways. First, he uses it to collect recommendations about destinations from his followers. He will use Facebook and Twitter to ask his followers about a destination before he goes; then Adam takes the recommendations and creates a Board on Pinterest to store the recommendations. An example Adam gave me was from a trip he took to Amsterdam. He said, “I was in Amsterdam last week and I am tweeting that I am in Amsterdam. I was literally only in Amsterdam for 24 hours and I had a handful of tips come in for random restaurants and cafes” (Groffman “Travels of Adam Interview”). While he didn’t have enough time to go to everywhere that was recommended, he was able to save the recommendations to his Pinterest board for future reference. The second way he uses Pinterest is to share his own content. He said, “any new content I also share on Pinterest and everything is linked back to my own website” (Groffman “Travels of Adam Interview”).

Finally, while both bloggers praised YouTube for its potential, neither has used the platform heavily over the past few years. Deb said, “we stopped for some time,” but now “posting every week is the strategy to go, because we have been building [the audience] slowly, like a few months ago we were at 900 [subscribers], now we’re at 1,500” (Bouskill and Corbeil
One tactic they use to grow their audience is to partner with other YouTubers. Dave said, “get showcases on someone else’s channel. It could really help boost your subscriber base and reach a new audience” (Bouskill and Corbeil “ThePlanetD Interview”). An example they gave was when they were interviewed about Dave’s recent injury; Deb said, “we had a Youtuber just interview us about Dave’s accident and in one day we got 100 subscriber” (Bouskill and Corbeil “ThePlanetD Interview”).

The last time Adam posted to YouTube was in December 2013. Adam said the reason he hasn’t posted to YouTube in so long is because “it is all edited by myself and often it is a bit exhausting and not where my interests lie” (Groffman “Travels of Adam Interview”). At one point he attempted running a vlog, but he stopped when he realized it would be too much work to continue with his blog.

**RQ3: How does each social media platform offer value to the bloggers client (DMO)?**

For Facebook, Dave and Deb believe the ability to share different types of content and get more in-depth with each post is valuable for their clients. Dave said, “you can write a lot more and you can get more in depth…it’s not so much real time conversation, but it still makes people think” (Bouskill and Corbeil “ThePlanetD Interview”). While Adam on the other hand thinks the value comes purely from the exposure it can generate. He believes his clients are “generally looking for exposure,” and that Facebook’s wide use gives it the potential to reach the most people. He said, “I make sure anything new or interesting is shared [on Facebook] because you are more likely to reach a greater amount of fans” (Groffman “Travels of Adam Interview”).

For Twitter, both bloggers agree the value is the connection they can make with a user. Instead of just pushing a message to the user, they can have a conversation with them. For Dave
and Deb, the brevity of Tweets allows them to respond to their fans quickly on the road. This allows them to not only share their experiences as they are happening, but also respond and communicate with their fans about those experiences. The same goes for Adam, who described a before-during-after approach to his travels. He said:

“Before I go to a destination I can go to Twitter to get travel tips, or at least start a discussion. During the trip I like to post as much in real time as possible and I like to be as authentic as possible as well…I may not share so many links, but definitely photos. Then after the trip I share any content I wrote about a destination” (TravelsofAdam – Interview).

This means he can start the conversation before he even travels to the destination; usually informing his followers about his travel plans and asking for their advice. Then while he is at the destination, his followers can follow along his Tweets; almost as if they are experiencing the destination through his Twitter profile. Then after returning to Berlin, Adam can share more detailed stories with his Twitter followers by Tweeting links to his blog posts. This communication helps to involve the user in the trip and adds value to the message the destination is trying to promote.

Not only is Instagram gaining popularity among DMOs, but both bloggers see the potential it has for destinations. One of the main reasons Dave and Deb think Instagram is a valuable social media for destinations is the inspiring aspect of the visual platform. Deb recalled a time when they were traveling in Kuala Lumpur and she saw a photo of the Golden Rock in Myanmar. Deb said, “I was on the subway and I was like we have to go there. So we completely changed our travel plans based on a photograph” (Bouskill and Corbeil “ThePlanetD Interview”). This is a common engagement trend they see in the interaction they receive on their
own posts as well. Deb said, fans will “tag their friends and be like ‘we have to go there next year’ and you know it’s a visual immediate impact” (Bouskill and Corbeil “ThePlanetD Interview”). Not only does this increase the engagement on their posts, but it also extends the reach of the post to people who do not follow ThePlanetD.

Beyond its potential, Adam went as far as to call Instagram the “strongest tool for destination marketing organizations” (Groffman “Travels of Adam Interview”). Both bloggers agree that even though you can share visual content on other social media platforms, Instagram is more effective. This is because Instagram users are on Instagram for photographs; which means they are more likely to notice and interact with an image on Instagram as opposed to another social media platform with other types of content. Dave said, “people that are going there and using Instagram are, I think, a lot more easily impacted by the visuals than say maybe on Facebook or Twitter” (Bouskill and Corbeil “ThePlanetD Interview”).

Neither Dave/Deb nor Adam receives requests to use Google+ or Pinterest during campaigns. So the only real value they can offer their clients is to extend the reach of other content that was a part of the campaign, including blog posts and photographs. As for YouTube, giving the destination exposure through video gives the bloggers a way to showcase the activities they did and the sights they saw on their trips.

**RQ4: How does each social media platform offer value to the blog itself?**

Both bloggers agree that the main value Facebook offers themselves is the traffic it drives back to their blogs. According to Dave, “Facebook is the most important channel at the moment for our blog” (Bouskill and Corbeil “ThePlanetD Interview”). This is due to the fact that, among social media, Facebook drives the most traffic to their blog. Dave said, Facebook “drives the
most traffic [to their blog] out of all of our social media channels” (Bouskill and Corbeil “ThePlanetD Interview”). For Adam, Facebook does not drive the most traffic out of his social media platforms; however, he said that the traffic from Facebook was more “consistent” (Groffman “Travels of Adam Interview”).

While Facebook was the most important social media platform for their blog, Dave said the most important social media for their brand is Twitter. He said, “I would say for the brand it’s probably Twitter…because that is where we can tell a story all day long” (Bouskill and Corbeil “ThePlanetD Interview”). Out of all of his social media platforms, Adam enjoys using Twitter the most. He values it because of his ability to interact with his followers. He said, “We might Tweet back and forth for 20 minutes and then I never hear from them again for months or something” (Groffman “Travels of Adam Interview”). Both bloggers also value Twitter for the traffic it brings back to their blogs when they Tweet links to their blog posts.

Dave and Deb believe “Instagram for travel especially is a really great platform” (Bouskill and Corbeil “ThePlanetD Interview”). They value the ability to write up to 400 words with each Instagram post allows Dave and Deb to write what they consider a “mini blog post” (Bouskill and Corbeil “ThePlanetD Interview”). One day they might try and write “something poetic” for their post, while the next they might use it solely to describe the destination. Along with Adam, they both value the ability to show their readers some of the sights they see while traveling. However, Adam likes to insert a little more personality into his Instagram posts; he said, “I tend to mix in a little more personality, maybe a selfie or you know a meal, or other smaller details from a trip” (Groffman “Travels of Adam Interview”). He believes this adds value to his personal brand saying, “I definitely play up the fact that I am Adam” (Groffman “Travels of Adam Interview”).
While Dave believes Google+ is a great platform to showcase his photography, Deb thinks the real value to them is improving their Google search results. Deb said, “I personally feel it’s about search, because our number one referral of traffic [to their blog] is Google” (Bouskill and Corbeil “ThePlanetD Interview”). However, when it comes to traffic coming to their blog directly from Google+, Dave described it as a “slow burn” (Bouskill and Corbeil “ThePlanetD Interview”). Adam mainly uses Google+ to further promote his blog posts; however, it has little value for his blog because his audience is not as active on it.

Even though Pinterest is not yet producing as much traffic as they would hope, it is still the main value Pinterest offers Dave and Deb. By including Call to Actions in their Pins and hiring someone to optimize their boards, Dave and Deb have seen a 50-75% boost in traffic coming from Pinterest. Traffic is definitely the biggest value Pinterest offers Adam, because it provides the most traffic to his blog from a social media platform. He said, “Pinterest is the largest driver of traffic, as far as social media goes… I have a handful of Pins that have been re-pinned over 20-30 thousand times and those bring traffic everyday” (Groffman “Travels of Adam Interview”). Additionally, Adam said, “Pinterest has the potential to drive traffic long-term because “the shelf life or longevity of this type of content is much longer” (Groffman “Travels of Adam Interview”).

Finally, while YouTube has the smallest following out of all of their social media profiles, Dave and Deb expect it to become one of their most popular in the future. To them the value of YouTube is that “it is a great story telling mechanism” (Bouskill and Corbeil “ThePlanetD Interview”). Since he hasn’t posted to YouTube in over a year, the only value YouTube currently provides Adam’s blog is the ability to showcase some of his past travels.
DISCUSSION

Taking the information from the content analysis and interview responses into account, several themes emerged. First, there is no “correct” way for a travel blogger to use social media. Second, Dave/Deb and Adam agreed that Twitter is the social media platform most commonly requested by DMOs; however, when working on a campaign for a DMO, Instagram use is on the rise. Third, the use of video is becoming increasingly more important when working with DMOs. Which means travel bloggers should invest their efforts in developing an audience on YouTube. Finally, in addition to using social media to disseminate content, travel bloggers use it to connect with their audience.

Comparing the social media use of Dave/Deb and Adam, two strategies for social media emerged: a strategic/planned approach and an organic, in the moment approach. When discussing their use of social media, Dave and Deb often mentioned the research they conducted for each platform. On Instagram they research which hashtags are performing well. Additionally, they search for hashtags that are commonly used by larger accounts. Not only does this dual use of hashtags allow them to amplify the reach of their posts, but it also increases their chances of being promoted by larger accounts, which in turn would increase their own audience size. When it comes to their Facebook use, Dave and Deb research the optimal times to share content with their audience. They found that pictures perform well in the morning, while blog posts tend to have a higher click through rate in the afternoon. However, Dave and Deb do not always have time to research the best practices for a social media. This is the case with their use of Pinterest, instead of optimizing their Pinterest profile themselves they hired a specialist to do it for them. Using the information they found with their social media research, Dave and Deb schedule their social media content to be posted at the optimal time. Adam on the other hand prefers to take an
organic real time approach to social media. Following this approach, Adam posts to his social media accounts in the moment from his phone. This means that none of his posts are scheduled or planned ahead of time.

When discussing which social media platforms DMOs most often request they use during a campaign, both Dave/Deb and Adam agreed it was Twitter. Interestingly, both bloggers think Instagram is becoming more important for destinations. Deb mentioned that Instagram is a “great platform” for travel, while Adam went as far as to call Instagram the “strongest tool for destination marketing organizations.” Deb reasoned that visuals inspire people to want to travel to a destination; she also discussed the trend of users tagging their friends in comments on destination images expressing their interest in going to the destination. While you can post images to other social media platforms, both Dave/Deb and Adam believe Instagram has more potential because its only function is to share visuals. On other platforms different types of content can be shared, this means the visuals are competing with other content for the user’s attention. Many times destinations will invite bloggers to participate in Instagram-only campaigns. This was the case for Dave and Deb when working with Travel Oregon, both on their profile and Travel Oregon’s. Even though Adam’s campaign with Visit Ljubljana included the use of other social media platforms, he mentioned that he has taken part in Instagram-only campaigns before.

Beyond photographs, video content is also becoming increasingly important. Deb said they almost always include video work as a part of their package, while Adam expressed that one of the first questions destinations ask is, “do you do video?” However, demand for video from destinations does not necessarily translate into creating content on YouTube. Sometimes when Dave and Deb create videos it is for the client’s website, other times, they will post videos on
Facebook. For both bloggers, their YouTube audience is the smallest of their social media platforms. Yet, both Deb and Adam expressed Youtube importance going forward. Deb said she expects YouTube to be one of their most important social media platforms in the future, while Adam went as far as to say “YouTube is definitely the future.” A key factor to success with YouTube seems to be the consistency of posting videos. Both Dave/Deb and Adam agreed they haven’t been consistent enough with YouTube to successfully grow a large audience. By changing their strategy to post one video a week, Dave and Deb were able to increase their audience size from 900 to 1,500 in a few months.

While social media is a great platform to share and disseminate content, one of its more important characteristics is the ability to facilitate two-way conversations. Each of the six platforms discussed in this study allow fans to comment on posts. Instead of just sharing information or stories about a destination, travel bloggers can create conversations within the comment section of their posts. Additionally, each of the six social media platforms gives users the ability to send messages to other users. Both Dave/Deb and Adam value the ability to connect with their audience through the interactions they have on social media. The two platforms they interact with their fans the most on are Facebook and Twitter. Both bloggers mentioned they receive several messages a day on Facebook from their fans. Dave and Deb said they received as many messages on Facebook as comments they receive on their blog. Similarly, Twitter offers travel bloggers the opportunity to Tweet back and forth with their fans; however, Twitter Chats make it easier to communicate with multiple people at once. Dave and Deb often host and participate in Twitter chats to build their audience and establish their expertise in travel. While Adam has hosted Twitter Chats in the past, he only participated in them for about twenty minutes each month.
CONCLUSION

With the development of Web 2.0 and the growth of social media over the last decade, a new industry, known as travel blogging, has been created. Travel bloggers rely on social media to share content that drives traffic to their blogs. Building audiences on their social media channels allows travel bloggers to promote destinations through partnerships with Destination Marketing Organizations (DMOs).

This study examined two recent campaigns which utilized a combination of blog posts and social media content. While the industry is dynamic and constantly evolving, some clear trends did emerge. DMOs most often request travel bloggers use Twitter for their marketing campaigns, while the bloggers believe Instagram is a more effective marketing tool for destinations. While more difficult to produce, videography is likely to be increasingly important for travel bloggers in the future. The strategy behind their social media use varies from blogger to blogger. Some research, plan, and automate their posts; while others post organically in real time. However, one thing travel bloggers have in common with regard to their social media use is that they use it to connect and engage with their audience.

Consumers are using the internet to research and plan their travels more than ever before. With this growing trend in mind, the use of digital media in a destination’s marketing plan is becoming increasingly more important. Using social media to disseminate campaign content, travel bloggers are able to have conversations with their fans through comments and messages. By utilizing travel bloggers, DMOs are able to promote their destination with an engaged audience.
Grounded in travel writing, the practice of travel blogging is increasingly becoming more visual in nature. Based on the findings of this research, here are a few predictions for where the travel blogging industry is heading. First, Instagram will become the most used social media platform for campaigns with DMOs. Beyond providing quality photographs, it will be important for bloggers to drive engagement with their audience on Instagram. Second, more travel bloggers will begin to use videography for their campaigns; whether it is for YouTube, Facebook, or the destinations website. However, based on its usage among consumers, expect YouTube to be the most utilized platform for video. Finally, while not every blogger follows a strategic approach to social media, the use of analytics to optimize social media performance will grow. With the number of travel blogs rising, it will become important for bloggers to research their social media use, such as optimal timing and successful hashtag use.
LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Due to the fact that this study only examined two travel blogs, results are not generalizable. While tentative conclusions can be drawn from these cases, the results cannot be generalized to other blogs or cases. Another limitation is the amount of time that has elapsed since the campaigns took place. In the time since the campaign, it is possible that the bloggers may have forgotten details or information related to the research. This means that the quality of the data is dependent on the bloggers recollection of the campaign. One final limitation is that this study only took into consideration the opinions of the travel bloggers and not the DMOs that commissioned these campaigns.

It is recommended that further research be completed with a larger sample size that also takes into account the opinions of the supporting DMOs. With a larger sample, more themes in responses could be determined leading to more findings. Additionally, by interviewing the DMO responsible for the campaign, insights into how they chose the blogger and criteria they look for could be determined.
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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Overview of Social Media Platforms

Facebook

Founded by Mark Zuckerberg in his Harvard dorm room on February 4, 2004, Facebook was originally intended to connect Harvard University students with one another. Today, eleven years since its launch, Facebook connects around 1.39 billion monthly users globally, making Facebook the world’s largest social network (“Company Info”). According to its website, Facebook’s mission is “to give people the power to share and make the world more open and connected. People use Facebook to stay connected with friends and family, to discover what’s going on in the world, and to share and express what matters to them” (“Company Info”).

When someone becomes a Facebook user they can personalize their profile by adding a photo and information about themselves, such as their birthday and interests. Next they can add other Facebook users to their “friends list” by searching for their name. To become a friend with someone on Facebook the user must first submit a “friend request,” then the other user must accept the request. The key attribute of a Facebook profile is the newsfeed. This is where Facebook users can see and interact with content of other users. Posts on the newsfeed can include both text and multimedia, including photos, videos, and links. Facebook users can interact with posts in three ways: they can like a post, they can comment on a post, and they can share a post.

Twitter

Around the time Facebook was preparing to open its social network to the general public, another social networking platform called Twitter was being developed. In 2006, Evan Williams, CEO of a podcasting company called Odeo, realized the future of his company was not in the
podcasting industry; so he urged his employees to come up with a new direction for the company (N. Carlson). An employee named Jack Dorsey came up with the idea for a social networking platform in which users could share 140-character statuses about what they were doing (N. Carlson). Working with Odeo co-founder, Noah Glass, Dorsey was able to develop a working Twitter prototype which officially launched on March 21, 2006, when Dorsey sent the first ever tweet.

Similar to Facebook, Twitter users are able to customize their profile with a photo and a short “about” section. In addition, posts are shown on a feed in reverse chronological order. Twitter's posts are called “Tweets” and unlike Facebook posts, Tweets are limited to 140 characters; however, they can include multimedia including photos, videos, and links. Another difference from Facebook is the ability to follow another user without having them follow you back. Instead of having a certain amount of friends, Twitter users have “followers.” One social media innovation that Twitter adopted was the use of the hashtag. Represented by pound symbol (#), the hashtag allowed for conversations to be grouped into topics which could be tracked by any user and today is used on multiple social networking sites, including Facebook and Instagram. Twitter users can interact with posts in three ways: they can favorite a Tweet, they can reply to a Tweet, and they can Retweet a Tweet.

**Instagram**

In October 2010, a new social networking platform called Instagram was released and in a matter of hours it went from a handful of users, to the top free photography app (Yung-Hui). However, the rapid growth did not stop there, within a week they had 100,000 users and by the three month mark had one million users (Siegler). Just this past year, Instagram reached 300 million active users, surpassing Twitter’s 284 million active users (O’Kane).
Instead of having multiple features like Facebook and Twitter, Instagram’s sole purpose is to share photos. Instagram further differentiates itself from Facebook and Twitter by the fact that it is primarily a mobile application. While you can view both your profiles and the profile of others, you cannot post directly from the Internet. Users can take a photo using the Instagram app or select one from their phone’s library, edit it using tools and filters, and then post it to their profile. Like Twitter, Instagram users can follow other users to see their content on their feed, which is also shown in reverse chronological order. Instagram users can interact with posts in three ways: they can like it, they can comment on it, and they can share it on other social media platforms including Facebook and Twitter.

**Pinterest**

Founded by Ben Silbermann, Evan Sharp, and Paul Sciarra in March of 2010, Pinterest was released only a few months before Instagram (“About Pinterest”). However, Pinterest was not fortunate enough to have the instant success that propelled Instagram to the top. Instead of having one million users after three months like Instagram, they only had 200 users after four months (Andersen). According to their website, “Pinterest is a visual bookmarking tool that helps you discover and save creative ideas” (“About Pinterest”).

Pinterest profiles differ greatly from other social media platforms because they do not feature a reverse chronological feed; instead, Pinterest profiles are designed in a grid layout. Posts on Pinterest are called “Pins,” which can be considered “visual bookmarks for good stuff you find anywhere around the web or right on Pinterest” (“About Pinterest”). Typical Pins are images that link to outside content usually about recipes, crafts, travel destinations, or inspirational quotes. When you pin something, you place it on a board; “boards are where you collect Pins by theme or topic” (“About Pinterest”). When a Pinterest user finds another user
whose collection of Pins they like, they have the option to follow all of their boards, or just a few they are interested in. Pinterest users can interact with posts in four ways: they can like it, they can comment on it, and they can share it on other social media platforms, and they can “Pin it” to their profile.

**YouTube**

YouTube was originally developed by Chad Hurley, Steve Chen, and Jawed Karim, in February 2005. With a goal of helping people “discover, watch and share originally-created videos,” Youtube gained success quickly (“About YouTube”). In October 2006, YouTube was purchased for $1.65 billion by Google (“Google to Acquire”). At the time it was acquired, YouTube was delivering 100 million video views per day, with 65,000 new videos uploaded daily (“Google to Acquire”). Today, YouTube receives more than one billion unique visitors each month, who combined watch over six billion hours of video per month (“Statistics”).

**Google+**

In June of 2011, Google launched a new project called Google+ in an attempt to become the next big social network (Barr). Google+ became the fastest growing social network. By July 24, 2011, Google+ had 25 million users, a number that took Facebook three years and Twitter 30 months to reach (Barr). Today, Google+ ranks as the seventh largest social network with over one billion enabled accounts and 359 million active monthly users. Each year Google+ grows at a rate of 33 percent (Romeri).

The Google+ profile is where you can tell the world who you are and what your interests are. It also affects how you appear within all of Google ("Features - Google+"). In your profile there is a feature called circles, which is the equivalent to your list of friends on Facebook ("Features - Google+"). By creating multiple updates, you can control whose updates you see
and who you would like to share your updates with. Communities on Google+ are groups where you can join conversations about topics that interest you, with individuals who share that same interest. ("Features - Google+”). However, one of the more popular features that separates Google+ from other social networks is the “Hangouts” feature. Like Skype, Hangouts are free video calls which you can use to connect with a single friend, or up to 10 friends at a time ("Features - Google+”).
Appendix B: Social Media Terminology

I. General
   i. **Comment**: A form of engagement in which a user can leave their thoughts on a post, whether it is a status on Facebook, a tweet on Twitter, a post on Instagram or Google+, a Pin on Pinterest or a video on YouTube.
   ii. **Engagement**: Interaction between the creator of the content and the audience, the viewer and the video, or the creator and the site. Can be measured by the number of interactions (comments, favorites, likes, or new subscriptions) per view.
   iii. **Handle**: A Handle is another way of saying a user’s account name.
   iv. **Hashtag**: A hashtag is a word or phrase preceded by the “#” sign. Hashtags are used to mark the topic or theme of social media messages in order to make them discoverable to people with shared interests. While hashtags originated on Twitter, they are now used on almost every other social media platform including Facebook, Google+, Instagram and Pinterest has been pinned to the top of a Twitter profile page
   v. **Share**: A social media function that enables users to distribute content via social media, email or direct links.

II. Facebook
   i. **Fans**: The people who like your Facebook Page
   ii. **Friend**: The people with whom you connect (or “Friend”), share content and updates
   iii. **Like**: Liking something on Facebook is understood as an expression of support for content. Likes can be tracked as a proof of engagement. Facebook’s algorithm adjusts individual content feeds based on like patterns.
   iv. **Message**: These are similar to private email messages. They appear in a user’s Facebook inbox or in the messenger app.
   v. **News Feed**: A News Feed is where a user can see status updates from their friends or pages they follow.
   vi. **Profile**: The Profile is where a user’s complete picture and story on Facebook appear. It includes a Profile Picture, biography, personal information, as well as, other features.
   vii. **Status**: An update to a user’s Timeline which allows users to discuss their thoughts, whereabouts, or important information with their friends. A status can include text, multimedia (photos/videos), or link to content on the Internet.
   viii. **Tag**: A Tag is a feature that allows a user to mark their friends in photos or posts they publish.
   ix. **Timeline**: shows all of a user’s updates and activities in reverse chronological order
III. Twitter
   i. Direct Message (DM): A private Twitter message sent to one of your followers. Direct messages can only be sent to a user who is already following you, and you can only receive direct messages from users you follow.
   ii. Favorites: A type of bookmarking feature to assist you in finding Tweets.
   iii. Feed: A list of Tweets usually sorted chronologically with the most recent updates appearing at the top.
   iv. Follower: A Twitter user who has subscribed to your Twitter account so they can receive your Tweets in their Home feed. If you want to send them a direct message, you need to follow them back.
   v. Following: The number of accounts that a Twitter handle is following.
   vi. Follows: The number of accounts that are following a Twitter handle.
   vii. Pinned Tweet: A Tweet that...
   viii. Retweet: A Tweet that is re-shared to the followers of another user’s Twitter account.
   ix. Trending: A list of trending terms that are popular on Twitter at that time.
   x. Tweet: A Twitter message. Tweets can contain up to 140-character messages along with photos, videos, and other content.
   xi. Unfollow: The action of unsubscribing from another Twitter user’s account.

IV. Pinterest
   i. Boards: These are topic-specific virtual boards that a user creates in their account. Boards are where users add their Pins.
   ii. Comment: A form of engagement on Pinterest which users can use to add their thoughts to Pins they find on Pinterest.
   iii. Hashtag: See the “Hashtag” definition in the Twitter section.
   iv. Like: A form of engagement on Pinterest which users can use to mark Pins they are interested in.
   v. Pin: Pins are photos that users add to their Boards on Pinterest.

V. Google+
   i. +1 Button: Equivalent to Facebook’s “Like” button. It means “I really like this idea and I’m showing my support for it.”
   ii. Circles: Google+ circles are a method for sorting your Google+ contacts by social context, location, shared interest, or any other criteria. They allow you to organize people on Google+ to match the way you actually know them in real life. With Circles, you can easily share different content with different categories of people. You can also filter what other people are sharing so you never miss an important update from your closest friends and family.
   iii. Extended Circles: On Google+, your extended circles include all the people in your circles, plus all the people in your circles’ circles. In other words, everyone within two degrees of separation. When you share something on Google+, you can choose to share it with your extended circles. That post could then appear on the Home page of somebody in one of your circles, where it would be visible to people in their circles.
VI. Youtube

i. **Channels**: A channel is the public page for a user account on YouTube. It contains uploaded videos, playlists, liked videos, favorited videos, channel comments and general activity. Some creators manage or create content across multiple channels.

ii. **Comments**: These are written comments on videos, channels, playlists or in response to other comments. Comments may be posted either on the watch page or on a channel page.

iii. **Favorite(s)**: A user action that adds a video to their channel’s Favorites playlist. This action can also be broadcast to subscribers.

iv. **Feed**: A stream of activity either for one channel (via the channel page feed) or for multiple channels (the homepage feed). Feed activities include uploads, updated playlists, video comments, channel comments, new subscriptions, bulletins, likes, favorites and sharing.

v. **Like(s)**: A user action that shows appreciation for a video. This action can be broadcast to subscribers in the feed.

vi. **Subscriber / Subscription**: By subscribing to a channel, users will see that channel’s activity in their homepage feed. Subscribers can also opt into email communication from subscribed channels on a per-upload and weekly digest basis.

vii. **Vlog**: A video-blog. A casual, conversational video format or genre featuring a person talking directly to camera.
Appendix C: ThePlanetD Sample Social Media Posts

Facebook

April 30, 2014

Twitter

May 1, 2014

April 11, 2014
@ThePlanetD - March 29, 2014

@TravelOregon March 31, 2014

Google+

Dave Bouskill

A Sun Star at Smith Rock, Oregon
Smith Rock State Park in Oregon offers some stunning views. We hiked the Misery Ridge walk in the rain the day before but were treated to a stunning sunrise the next morning.
http://travelphotography.theplanetd.com/North-America/United-States/

#photography #landscapephotography by +Margaret Tompkins #LandscapePhotography +HQOP Landscape +LANDSCAPE Photos #bplandscape by +Nancy Dempsey #sunrise #sunrisephotography #TravelOregon #TravelOregon #travel #travelphotography #GooglePhotos +GooglePlusPhotos #googlepluspostd #breakfastclub #breakfastclub #500px +onOneSoftware

Show less.

April 28, 2014

Dave Bouskill

Sun Kissed Peaks at Smith Rock, Oregon
Patience always pays off in photography. Waiting for the right time to capture a moment can make or break a photo. In this shot I decided to wait until the light hit the peak on the right and the sky was bright enough to give the exposure in the water.
I decided to keep the rest of the image a little dark to keep focus on the peaks. Please enjoy and Share.
http://theplanetd.com/high-sun-kissed-smith-rock/

#photography #landscapephotography by +Margaret Tompkins #LandscapePhotography #TravelOregon #TravelOregon #photography #sunrise #sunrisephotography #TravelOregon #TravelOregon #travel #travelphotography #GooglePhotos +GooglePlusPhotos #googlepluspostd #breakfastclub #breakfastclub #500px +onOneSoftware

Show less.

May 1, 2014
Appendix D: Travels of Adam Sample Social Media Posts

**Facebook**

June 25, 2014

I've just made it to a new country and new city that I've never been to before! I'm in Ljubljana, Slovenia through the weekend with some support from Visit Ljubljana --- check out the hashtag #Tasteljubljana on Twitter and if you've been before, please recommend some things to do! I'll add it to my Pinterest board! http://www.pinterest.com/travelseofad ... /ljubljana-travel-tips/

Like · Comment · Share · 24 · 4

June 29, 2014

**Twitter**

June 25, 2014

Only just arrived in Ljubljana and ready to take on this city! (And eat all it's food) #tasteljubljana

June 27, 2014

Early my favorite café in Ljubljana. Cut hipster boys, MacBooks and good coffee #livingthedream #Tasteljubljana 🩰
**Instagram**

June 26, 2014

June 27, 2014

**Google+**

July 14, 2014

July 29, 2014
Travels of Adam - Ljubljana Travel Tips Pinterest Board

Wanderful-World Blog Post Pin

Travels of Adam Blog Post Pin
ACADEMIC VITA

Brad T. Imming

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West Chester, PA, 19382
Brad.t.Imming@gmail.com

Education:
B.A., Advertising/Public Relations, Pennsylvania State University, Spring 2015
Minor in Global and International Studies Minor
Minor in Business and Liberal Arts Minor
Honors in Telecommunications

Honors:
2nd Place in Social and Behavioral Sciences, 2015 Undergraduate Exhibition
Recipient of the Daniel Hartman Honors Scholarship in the College of Communications
Recipient of the 2014 AAF Vance and Betty Stickell Scholarship
Recipient of the Media Association of Pittsburgh Scholarship
Recipient of the President’s Freshman Award
Recipient of the President Spark’s Award
Dean’s List for all eight semesters

Activities:
Presenter, Penn State College of Communications Undergraduate Symposium
Penn State Chapter of the AAF AdClub: Event Planning Assistant; Membership Assistant
PNC Leadership Assessment Center Participant
Global Programs Office: Peer Adviser

Experience:
Central Pennsylvania Creative Professionals - State College, PA
Event Planning Intern Nov.’13 – Dec.’14

Leo Burnett – Chicago, IL
Account Management Intern - Pfizer Nexium June – Aug. ’14

Gillespie Group – Wallingford, PA
Account Management Intern May – Aug. ’13

Study Abroad:
World Media Systems Embedded Program
Czech Republic March 7th - 16th ’14

International Studies Institute at Palazzo Rucellai
Florence, Italy Jan. - May ‘13