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(DON'T YOU) WISH YOU WERE HERE? NARCISSISM, ENVY AND SHARING OF TRAVEL PHOTOS THROUGH SOCIAL MEDIA: AN EXTENDED ABSTRACT

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INTRODUCTION

Consumers are increasingly relying on user-generated content on social media for their awareness and subsequent decisions regarding travel destinations (Litvin, Goldsmith and Pan 2008; O'Connor 2008; Tussyadiah and Fesenmaier 2008). This user-generated content – photos, comments, narratives and stories – is perceived by consumers to be more trustworthy and reliable compared to traditional sources of tourism information (Akehurst 2009).

Some experts have called this explosion in user-generated media a “mega trend” in the tourism industry (Xiang and Gretzel 2009). Thus, understanding consumer motivations for sharing their travel through social media may provide tremendous advantage for tourism marketers. Bronner and de Hoog (2014) found that personal motivations (e.g. self-expression, self-enhancement, self-esteem and extroversion) were one of the leading motivators for posting travel reviews, albeit one of eight categories. Yoo and Gretzel (2011) point out that personality traits are not only one of the biggest determinants of consumers' likelihood to create and distribute travel-related content, but also one of the most stable. This study focuses on one such personality trait, narcissism, as a motivation to engage in these behaviors, as well as envy.

Specifically, it is proposed that usage of social media (in this case, Facebook) promotes narcissism and creates feelings of envy, which in turn motivates consumers to post their travel-related photos to express feelings of superiority, as well as to overcome feelings of envy.

BACKGROUND

Social media such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram have created a world in which its users' lives are increasingly performed before an audience of family, friends, casual acquaintances and even strangers. Some recent research suggests that a result of these performances are an increase in the levels of narcissism in today's society. For example, there appears to be a relationship between narcissism and social media usage (Mehdizadeh 2010), as well as between narcissism and self-promotion through social media (Buffardi and Campbell 2008). In other words, social media have provided an ideal platform for expressing one's sense of being special or exceptional.

However, other research suggests that social media may have the opposite effect. Interacting with a network of acquaintances – each motivated to portray himself or herself in the best possible light – may create feelings of inadequacy or inferiority. Facebook users demonstrate higher levels of envy and lower life satisfaction ((Krasnova, Wenninger, Widjaja and Buxmann 2013) and frequently perceive others as being happier and having better lives (Chou and Edge 2012). Furthermore, Facebook interaction may increase communication overload and reduce self-esteem (Chen and Lee 2013). A recent study found that not only is Facebook positively related to both narcissism and envy, but that envy provides much stronger motivation to promote oneself,

particularly through conspicuous consumption spotlighted on social media (Taylor and Strutton In Press).

Building on these lines of inquiry, this examines the influence of Facebook on envy and narcissism, specifically as motivations to post photos of themselves traveling to desirable or exotic locations. Where previous generations chronicled their travels through letters, journals and snapshots, today's travelers document their journeys in real time through social media. Understanding the extent to which posting travel "selfies" is motivated by, in turn, narcissism and envy will provide valuable insights for psychological theory, as well as actionable strategies and tactics for practitioners in the travel and tourism industry.

From this theoretical foundation, five interrelated hypotheses are proposed:

- H1: Facebook usage is positively related to intention to post travel photos.
- H2: Facebook usage is positively related to narcissism.
- H3: Facebook usage is positively related to envy.
- H4: Narcissism is positively related to intention to post travel photos.
- H5: Envy is positively related to intention to post travel photos.

METHODOLOGY

Data were collected through an online survey from respondents recruited by students at a large public university in the Southwestern United States who received extra credit. Students were instructed to recruit up to five respondents, two of whom were required to be younger than 30, and two of whom had to be 30 or older. To track the recruitment process, each student was provided with a unique URL. The researchers employed strict controls to ensure the integrity of the data, including checking for duplicate IP addresses, multiple consecutive responses from the same student recruiter, and duration of the survey.

After screening, 674 usable responses were used in the analysis. Sixty two percent were female and 38 percent were male. The mean age was 33 (standard deviation=14.1), with 48 percent aged 25 or under, 16 percent aged 26-35, 12 percent aged 36-45, 16 percent aged 46-55, and 8 percent over 55. The sample was comprised of 59 percent white/Caucasian, 15 percent black, 14 percent Hispanic, 8 percent Asian and 6 percent other. The majority of the respondents (51%) were non-students, with 49% indicating that they were students.

Scales were adapted from previous studies. Envy ($\alpha=.928$, mean=2.2, SD=.23) was measured with a 5-point modified Likert scale adapted from Krasnova et al. (2013). Facebook usage ($\alpha=.862$, mean=4.6, SD = .88) was adapted from the same study, and used a 7-point modified Likert scale. Narcissism ($\alpha=.766$, mean=2.9, SD=.27) was measured with a 5-point Likert scale adapted from Ames, Rose & Anderson (2006), while the scale for Intention to Post Travel Photos ($\alpha=.814$, mean=2.6, SD=.23) utilized 5-point Likert statements adapted from Eastman et al. (1999).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

First, the scales were validated using Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) using IBM SPSS Version 22. A factor analysis was conducted with Varimax rotation. All items loaded cleanly on four factors with factor loadings of .629 and above. The items, factor loadings and statistics are provided in Table 1. Next, a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted using AMOS Version 22. All paths were significant and positive, and the indices indicated a good fit between the model and the data (Chi-square=564, df=199, $p < .001$, GFI=.928, CFI=.952, RMSEA=.05).

To test the hypothesized model, a structural equation model (SEM) was tested using AMOS Version 22. The indices again indicated a good fit with the data (chi-square=564, df=200, $p < .001$, GFI=.928, CFI=.952, RMSEA=.05). All paths were significant, providing support for each hypothesis. H1 (Facebook usage \rightarrow Posting travel photos) was supported ($\beta = .22$, $p < .001$), as were H2 (Facebook usage \rightarrow Narcissism) ($\beta = .21$, $p < .001$) and H3 (Facebook usage \rightarrow Envy) ($\beta = .32$, $p < .001$). In addition, the Narcissism \rightarrow Posting travel photos path was significant ($\beta = .31$, $p < .001$), in support of H4. Finally, H5 (Envy \rightarrow Posting travel photos) was supported, with the largest path weight ($\beta = .42$, $p < .001$).

As expected, the level of Facebook usage was positively correlated with likelihood to post travel photos. As in previous studies, a positive relationship was found between Facebook usage and narcissism, but the positive relationship between Facebook usage and envy was even stronger. Similarly, while narcissism had a stronger direct effect on posting travel photos than Facebook usage, the strongest influence was from envy.

IMPLICATIONS FOR THEORY AND PRACTICE

For marketing theorists, this study provides additional evidence of the relationship between Facebook usage and narcissistic personality traits. As many psychologists and other scientists have pointed out, the rise in social media appears to be creating what could be generations of narcissists whose every thought or action plays out in the public sphere. Similarly, as Facebook usage increases, so does the level of envy those Facebook users feel toward others whose lives appear to be better, more glamorous or more prosperous than their own. Finally, this study provides evidence that narcissism and envy both motivate social media to engage in the conspicuous display of their consumption activities – in this instance, leisure travel. This is a strong contributor to the literature on narcissism and the question of whether today's ubiquitous social media connections stoke an increase in narcissism, or vice versa. While this study cannot answer the question of directionality, it does raise interesting questions for future research.

For the tourism marketing industry, this study provides interesting insights into their customers that can be transformed into actionable strategies. Not only do consumers post photographs of their vacations to spotlight themselves and their travels, but they are even more strongly motivated to post travel photos to counter their feelings of envy. By playing on these underlying motivations, tourism marketers can encourage their customers and guests to post travel photographs on social media, thus increasing the presence of destination photographs and, in turn, awareness and interest from future customers. They can facilitate photos that reinforce envy-producing narratives by suggesting or encouraging backdrops for 'selfies' that put the

traveler in an envy-inspiring photo. In fact, these very photos can inspire envy among others, motivating them to engage in travel. For tourism marketers, this interaction creates a positive feedback loop.

Tourism marketers should both encourage and facilitate the posting of photos on social media aimed at stoking the egos of their customers, but even more importantly, generating envy among viewers.

REFERENCES

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