

# **The Importance of Engagement on Social Media Platforms: A Case Study**

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## **ABSTRACT**

The tourism sector has long been associated with new technologies, and more specifically with social media. The objective of this study is to analyse the interaction between tourist satisfaction, tourist engagement, and user generated content on social media, especially on Twitter. We propose a model based on these three related variables. The context of the model is tourist related events and locations, and consists of three hypotheses which are supported by the literature. To test our model we conducted our studies in two independent tourist related settings using both surveys and an analysis of the conversations relating to the event on the Twitter platform. We determined that the strongest influence on User Generated Content comes from tourist engagement as a mediator variable. Additionally, we found that achieving engagement among tourists visiting the destination is an effective way to generate positive content in social media. The study makes a new contribution to literature - the proposed model is innovative, in particular with the introduction of engagement as a mediator variable, and the incorporation of an analysis of social media content into the model validation. This information supports decisions at all levels that in turn improve educational process performance further.

**Keywords:** *User generated Contents, Engagement, Satisfaction, Social Media Analysis, Tourism*

## **Introduction**

There is great interest in educational leadership in the early part of the 21st century. This is because of the widespread belief that the quality of leadership makes a significant difference to school and student outcomes (Bush, 2007). Related to this, social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and numerous others have begun to revolutionize the state of marketing, advertising, and promotions (Hanna, Rohm & Crittenden, 2011) and with this also the educational model. These social platforms continue to play an increasingly influential role in the social and economic

aspects of the tourism industry. In the new social media-driven business model defined by customer connectivity and interactivity (Hanna, Rohm & Crittenden, 2011), individuals use these platforms to search, find, and read about tourist locations and events, and have a higher degree of trust in the content than in conventional marketing material (Zeng & Gerritsen, 2014). For this reason, the amount of digital information available to individuals is ever-increasing (Khan, Mohammad & Thakare, 2015). However, there is a lack of empirical data to describe and explain the role of social networks in the context of online travel information search (Xiang & Gretzel, 2010). The concept of management overlaps with that of leadership, a notion of great contemporary interest in most countries in the developed world. (Bush, 2007). Interactive digital media has catapulted company and consumer contact from the traditional Web 1.0 model to the highly interactive Web 2.0 world (Hanna, Rohm & Crittenden, 2011). Therefore, most marketers are using social media to develop loyal fans (68%) and gain marketplace intelligence (66%) (Stelzner, 2014). Additionally, there has been little background study that determines the participation of consumers in the exchanges and the possible impacts of such participation on other consumer behaviours (Bigné et al., 2013). The field of educational leadership and management is pluralist, with many competing perspectives and an inevitable lack of agreement on the exact nature of the discipline (Bush, 2007). These purposes or goals provide the crucial sense of direction to underpin school management (Bush, 2007), but in this case within a tourism perspective.

The objective of this study is to analyse the interaction between three key variables - satisfaction, engagement, and user generated content on social media, in relation to a specific tourist event. We test our hypotheses in the context of two tourist related events/locations in Spain, the "Marina d'Or", which is a popular tourist destination close to Castellon, Spain, and the "Fira d'Onda" festival, which is held annually in the town of Onda, in the Valencian Community, Spain. Surveys were conducted which were analysed using structural equation modelling, and additionally, we validated our model by analysing the messages published on the popular microblog platform Twitter, during the same period. The importance of addressing the subject from all points of view, helps in the development of the project for the future. A more in-depth analysis can be found in (Gómez, 2018).

This paper is organized as follows. In Section 2 we describe the key characteristics and importance of the social media platform Twitter. In Section 3 we present our model. Our experiments are described in Section 4 and these are analysed in Section 5. Finally, Section 6 presents our conclusions.

### **Social Media Platform: Twitter**

As a micro blogging and social networking website, Twitter has become very popular and has grown rapidly (Khan, Mohammad & Thakare, 2015). With the continued rise of social media as a communication platform, the ability to construct unsolicited public opinion polls has become a possibility for researchers through parsing of massive text-based datasets (Cody et al, 2016)

In Twitter a tweet is a text based post containing a maximum of 140 characters, which is approximately the length of a typical newspaper headline and subheading (Khan, Mohammad &

Thakare, 2015). The short messages are very easy and convenient to both sender and reader to share things of interest and communicate their thoughts anywhere and anytime in the world (Khan, Mohammad & Thakare, 2015). In this way, online social networks enable people to easily connect and maintain relationships with others independent of the individuals' locality (Jurgens, 2013).

Individuals post short messages (tweets) and may form asymmetric social relationships, known as following, where one individual monitors the tweets of another individual (Jurgens, 2013). A considerable amount of this information is in textual format, which can be broadly categorized into two main types: facts and opinions (Khan, Mohammad & Thakare, 2015). There are differences between these categories, as facts indicate objective information whereas opinions can be subjective and indicate the sentiment of the author about an issue. Opinions can be about anything, e.g. a product, a service or a company (Khan, Mohammad & Thakare, 2015). Public opinion data can be used to determine public awareness, to predict outcomes of events, and to infer characteristics of human behaviors (Cody et al, 2016) thus, Twitter is an ideal source for eliciting information about societal interest and general people's opinions (Khan, Mohammad & Thakare, 2015). Although "conversations" can occur using Twitter, the medium is designed for oneway interactions where users "tweet" information to their contacts (Davenport et al, 2014). Therefore, a significant 90% of marketeers said that social media is important to their businesses (Stelzner, 2014). In addition, it serves as an example of an educational innovation project that must be grown, which must evolve and must be done to expand it (Gómez, 2018).

### **Hypotheses**

As part of the services sector, tourism has inevitably been associated with the evolution of new technologies (Bigné, Aldás & Andreu, 2008). Tourists are changing the way in which they search, find, read and trust information, throughout the tourism sector (Zeng & Gerritsen, 2014). The process of deciding on the aims of the organization is at the heart of educational management (Bush, 2007). Anderson, Fornell and Mazvacheryl (2004) have investigated the long-term effects of customer satisfaction and concluded that satisfied consumers makes recommendations to others and therefore secures future income (Kobylanski, 2012). We start from the assumptions as postulations made from the data. That one serves as the basis for initiating the research or argumentation (Gómez, 2018). Therefore, it is argued that:

**H<sub>1</sub>:** Satisfaction has a direct influence on user generated contents in Social Networks

Users of social networks that are subject to information influence are expected to show a greater need to acquire information and guidance from contacts with greater knowledge, which will facilitate their engagement in the user-generated contents of social networks (Chu & Kim, 2011). Therefore, it is proposed that:

**H<sub>2</sub>:** Engagement has a direct influence on user generated contents in Social networks

Laroche et al. (2012) revealed that social networking communities promote shared awareness, society's obligation, rites and traditions, trust, and customer loyalty. A year later, Brodie et al (2013) specified the reach of consumers in online participation suggesting that consumers with a

good level of engagement present greater loyalty, empowerment, connection, emotional attachment, trust, and above all satisfaction. Based on these findings, it is argued that:

**H<sub>3</sub>:** Satisfaction has a direct influence on Engagement.

### Research Method

We conducted our studies in two independent settings (1) the Marina d'Or, which is a popular tourist destination close to Castellon, Spain, and (2) the "Fira d'Onda" festival, which is held in the town of Onda, in the Valencian Community, Spain. Both studies were conducted over one week (Easter 2016 in the case of Marina d'Or, and in the final week of October 2016 for the Fira d'Onda festival). In each case we conducted a questionnaire based survey which we analysed using structural equation models (SEM), and simultaneously collected and analysed conversations related to the event/destination which were being published on the Twitter social network. Our aim is to determine the extent to which Twitter can be used to complement traditional public opinion surveys, ideally as a dashboard indicator accompanied by solicited feedback. (Cody et al, 2016)

Regarding the survey, we collected a total of 282 valid questionnaires from visitors to Marina d'Or, and 215 at the Fira d'Onda. The participants were presented with a set of questions related to each of the variables being analysed. Participants were asked to express their opinions by indicating their position on each question on a scale anchored at 1 (completely disagree) to 5 (completely agree). In order to design these questions properly, we followed the approach of several authors who have proven the goodness of the scales used in previous researches (see Table 1). Concretely, for satisfaction: Echtner and Ritchie, 1991; Baloglu and McCleary, 1999; Bloemer and Odekerken-Schröder, 2002; Gallarza et al., 2002; Kim and Richardson, 2003; Beerli and Martín, 2004. For engagement: Nunnally and Bernstein, 1994, Sprott, Czellar & Spangenberg, 2009. And for user generated contents: Zeithaml et al, 1996, Bloemer and Odekerken-Schröder, 2002.

Table 1  
Measuring scales

Variable	Number ítems	References
Satisfaction	4	Baloglu and McCleary, 1999, Echtner and Ritchie, 1991; Beerli and Martín, 2004, Gallarza et al., 2002; Kim and Richardson, 2003.
Engagement	4	Nunnally and Bernstein, 1994, Sprott, Czellar & Spangenberg, 2009
User-generated Content	3	Zeithaml et al, 1996, Bloemer and Odekerken-Schröder, 2002

During the same periods, we monitored the conversations taking place on Twitter by downloading and analysing the relevant tweets. These were identified by selecting those which included the hashtags #marinador and #firadonda, along with a number of related search terms. The datasets were converted into a network using the NodeXL Social Network Analysis software. Then, the Clauset-Newman-Moore algorithm (Clauset et al, 2004) was applied to identify different

clusters of users in the network who are strongly connected (i.e., those who mention, reply to, or re-tweet each other’s messages). This process highlighted the most important users, their level of influence, and how closely the users were connected to one another.

We then conducted a semantic analysis on the conversations that could be identified as visitors, rather than organisations who were promoting the destination, focussing in particular on the polarity of opinion expressed in the conversation threads.

**Results and Analysis**

The analysis of the data obtained in the questionnaires was carried out using the EQS 6.3 program. From the measurement of the variables (satisfaction, engagement and user-generated contents) and the number of items used for each scale, as well as the references used, the instrument was validated by first contrasting the model with a confirmatory factor analysis structural equation. Our results are shown in Table 2. It has been demonstrated in both studies that there is a strong relationship between the variables, especially between engagement and user generated contents, as is illustrated graphically in Figure 1.

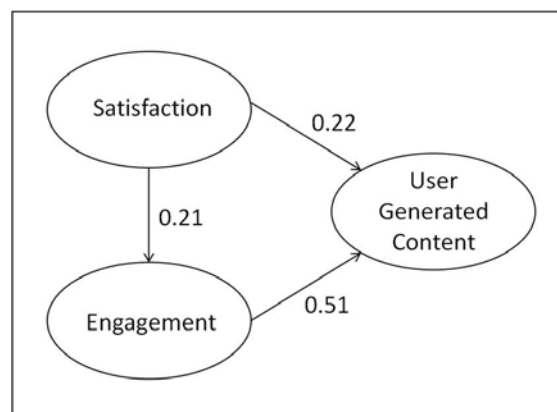


Figure1. Results of the structural model

Table 2  
Relationships in model

H	Relation	Parameter	t	Results
H1:	Satisfaction → UGC	0.22	6.97	accepted
H2:	Engagement → UGC	0.51	3.00	accepted
H3:	Satisfaction → Engagement	0.21	2.78	accepted

After processing and filtering the Twitter datasets as described above, we constructed datasets of 105 tweets written by Marina d’Or visitors, and 298 from Fira d’Onda visitors. Of those from which a polarity could be discerned, 95% of the Marina d’Or, and 98% of the Fira d’Onda messages could be classified as positive. While the quantities of data available for analysis were quite small, the large majority tweets expressing a positive sentiment does reinforce the findings of hypotheses

H1 and H2, i.e., that visitors' satisfaction and engagement did in fact result in positive feedback being posted online, at least on the Twitter platform, as is illustrated graphically in Table 2.

## Conclusions

In this paper we have proposed a model based on three related variables: engagement, satisfaction and user generated contents. We have tested our model in the context of two tourist related events and locations, examining information gleaned from both surveys and conversations taking place on social media platforms. We have seen that the best way to generate a strong relationship is from the tourist engagement through user generated content. Furthermore, we found that achieving an engagement among tourists is an effective way to generate positive content in social media.

The study we have conducted makes a positive contribution to the literature- the model is innovative especially with the introduction of engagement as a mediator variable, in addition to incorporating an analysis of social media content into the model validation.

Additionally, the analysis of the conversations investigated on the social media platform Twitter gives us a greater vision of the results obtained. Building a large-scale social network for millions of users with bidirectional following relationships is a time-intensive and potentially infeasible process due to the rate limits on accessing information from Twitter (Jurgens, 2013). Although we acknowledge limitations to the current research, we believe that the current findings regarding reasons for SNS usage will prompt researchers to include such motivational types of variables in future studies (Davenport et al, 2014). Although not only can tweets anticipate survey responses (Cody et al, 2016) is an important part to complement is study through surveys. The study of the role of social networks in marketing is an incipient area of investigation in tourism that must be thoroughly explored in order to understand the complex environment in which tourism firms and destinations operate (Zeng and Gerritsen 2014).

Educational management processes involve the arrangement and deployment of systems that ensure the implementation of policies, strategies, and action plans throughout a set of integrated practices in order to achieve educational goals (Bush, 2007). This study shows the essential way in the engagement related to whatever field.

Finally, the study has some inherent limitations that open up new lines for future research. The first limitation is the scope of our sample, which is limited to specific areas in one particular country. As such, we are intending to widen the study with samples in other regions, to provide a cross-cultural perspective (Kobylanski 2012). Other social media platforms such as Facebook and Tripadvisor are also under consideration.

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