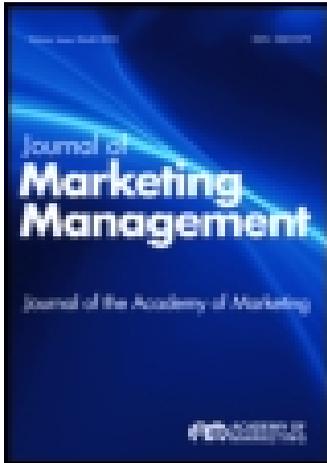


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Community crosstalk: an exploratory analysis of destination and festival eWOM on Twitter

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Abstract Research suggests that festivals can promote a destination via online word-of-mouth (eWOM) on social media, even though the nature of this effect is not yet fully understood. Using a combination of Social Network Analysis and text analysis (qualitative and quantitative), this article examines eWOM at a tourism destination (Bournemouth) when a festival (Bournemouth Air Show 2013) is staged. The Communities of Interest of eWOM interactions on Twitter were captured and analysed to understand the structure and content of eWOM. Findings indicate that key users are usually already prominent individuals and that festivals act as both a direct generator as well as an online animator of eWOM. Finally, network size, span and scope may be useful indicators when comparing eWOM networks.

Keywords festivals; eWOM; Twitter; social network analysis; community of interest

Introduction

The aim of this article is to explore the structure and content of online word-of-mouth (eWOM) within an online Community of Interest resulting from the staging of festivals at a tourist destination. Hallmark tourist events have been defined as fairs, expositions and cultural and sporting events of international status held on either a regular or one-off basis (Getz et al., 2010). Even when these events are not immediately profitable and significant amounts of public investment are needed to stage them, losses will be absorbed on the grounds that the wider economic benefit of these events will exceed costs (Essex & Chalkley, 2004). One of these wider benefits is support for development of tourism in the host community by increasing its visibility as a destination to visitors (O'Sullivan & Jackson, 2002) and business stakeholders (Lee & Hsu, 2013).

The ability of festivals to promote a tourism destination (Lee, Lee, & Lee, 2005) may be based on their ability to create new memory connections within the minds of audiences (Elliot, Papadopoulos, & Kim, 2011). These associations can be made via direct experience of the festival or, indirectly, via media information shared by the organizers and by the narratives of customers, that is, word-of-mouth or WOM (Keller, 1993). Festivals have been identified as a generator of WOM (Gwinner, 1997), which is defined as consumers sharing attitudes, opinions or reactions about a business, product or service with other people (Jansen, Zhang, Sobel, & Chowdury, 2009). Whilst WOM has been a powerful but poorly managed marketing tool (Buttle, 1998), these discussions are generated increasingly on the Internet (Mangold & Faulds, 2009) by current and potential visitors (Dellarocas & Narayan, 2006). Tourists interested in the festival and/or destination may review the online narratives of customers and events' attendees, which is a form of promotion based on online word-of-mouth or eWOM (Daugherty & Hoffman, 2014). In this research, eWOM is defined as statements made by current, former or potential customers about a product, service, experience or destination (Reza Jalilvand & Samiei, 2012) that are shared using online (web-based or mobile) communication platforms, resulting in customer discussions (Hennig-Thurau, Gwinner, Walsh, & Gremler, 2004).

An emerging stream of eWOM research has begun to analyse the structure (Luo & Zhong, 2015) or content of social media discussions (Lu & Stepchenkova, 2014). However, to date, little effort has been made to jointly analyse the structure and content of these discussions. Because network structures and content may both influence eWOM, this research seeks to fill the extant gap by applying Social Network Analysis (SNA), combined with quantitative and qualitative text analysis, to explore the structure and content of eWOM generated on social media by a destination while a festival is being staged.

Data collection focused on the narratives created on a social network, Twitter (www.twitter.com). Firstly, Twitter discussions concerning the festival and tourism destination were archived. Secondly, the Community of Interest was isolated by identifying interactions within tweets and modelled as two directed graphs: Tourism Destination and Festival. Clusters were then identified within each network, along with key individuals, prior to text analysis being applied to analyse Twitter.com profile information and content in order to classify each cluster. An analysis of the resulting patterns was used to infer the structure and content of eWOM and to make recommendations for research and practice. Findings indicate that event and destination eWOM form distinct clusters and influential nodes tend to be individuals who already have a significant media presence.

Social media and eWOM in tourism

As tourism is an experiential product, customers heavily rely on recommendations from other travellers who have already experienced the actual product (Haywood, 1989). While this was achieved in the past by WOM, these narratives have increasingly moved online (Buhalis & Law, 2008). Since the early nineties, the industry has moved from the need for an online presence (i.e. by creating a website) towards a more ubiquitous presence (Lamsfus, Wang, Alzua-Sorzabal, & Xiang, 2014). Travellers are part of this (r)evolution as they are increasingly exigent

and in constant need of relevant information to support their experience (Wang, Park, & Fesenmaier, 2012). Information often is not delivered by official providers but by unofficial sources (Inversini, Cantoni, & Buhalis, 2009). Social media is one such source providing information directly via dedicated websites or apps and indirectly by populating search engines' results (Xiang, Magnini, & Fesenmaier, 2015).

Social media can be generally understood as internet-based applications that encompass media impressions created by consumers, typically informed by relevant experiences and archived or shared online for access by other consumers (Xiang & Gretzel, 2010). Social media's ease of use and accessibility enables a wider range of customers to engage in eWOM (Dellarocas, 2003). Consumers are no longer passively receiving information, but, instead, they actively engage in online discussions, generating eWOM (Chu & Kim, 2011).

Compared with traditional WOM, eWOM is:

1. considered trustworthy, as research has found that people appear to trust seemingly disinterested opinions from other people outside their immediate social network (Duan, Gu, & Whinston, 2008);
2. considered effective due to its speed, convenience and lack of pressure for face-to-face interaction (Sun, Youn, Wu, & Kuntaraporn, 2006);
3. a risk-reducing tool influencing a tourism purchase (Litvin, Goldsmith, & Pan, 2008).

eWOM may also vary by context. Information-oriented eWOM tends to occur on product, organization or customer review websites (Shelly & Ye, 2010) and is focused on the assessment or ranking of product characteristics. Emotional eWOM is shared in general social media platforms and online communities and focuses on general impressions or opinions, which may be subjective (Daugherty & Hoffman, 2014). The latter is of particular value in the tourism domain (Luo & Zhong, 2015) and research in this area is mostly focused on:

1. social media as an eWOM information source where researchers examine its usage by travellers to obtain (Liang, Ekinci, Occhiocupo, & Whyatt, 2013) and disseminate travel information (Leung, Law, Van Hoof, & Buhalis, 2013) and
2. the rationale for sharing eWOM documenting personal experiences on social media (Robinson, 2014).

Customers may not always have positive experiences and the difficulty of managing WOM is magnified with eWOM, as customers may spread negative information as quickly as positive opinions (Jung, Ineson, & Green, 2013). This raises a potential challenge for tourism destination managers if eWOM is negative (Munar & Dioko, 2011), as it may spread more rapidly than positive eWOM (Teng, Wei Khong, Wei Goh, & Yee LoongChong, 2014).

An opportunity to investigate the nature of social media regarding eWOM may lie in the analysis of customer and attendee narratives created on social media in a Community of Interest around destinations and events (Neuhofer, Buhalis, & Ladkin, 2012). This provides the potential to understand the scale, extent and content of eWOM about a tourism destination and an event (Zaglia, 2013).

Social media communities of interest and eWOM

Customers engaged in eWOM discussion can be viewed as members of a network community that is defined by the relationships created by fans, customers or admirers (Muniz, Jr. & O'guinn, 2001). These communities can be online or offline, as well as small (Bagozzi & Dholakia, 2006) or large (Adjei, Noble, & Noble, 2010). Online communities can serve several purposes, including (1) interest, (2) relationship building, (3) transaction and (4) fantasy. *Communities of Interest (COI)* agglomerate individuals with a shared interest (Brown & Duguid, 2001) whilst *Communities of Relationships* connect individuals who need to share personal experiences, such as health concerns (Casaló, Flavián, & Guinaliu, 2008). *Communities of Transactions* are focused on financial or economic exchanges whilst *Communities of Fantasy* provide the opportunity for individuals to interact in a fantasy setting (Rothaermel & Sugiyama, 2001).

In this research, online COIs provide an opportunity for understanding eWOM as members combine content and communication to share knowledge (Obst, Zinkiewicz, & Smith, 2002) and experiences (Harwood & Garry, 2010) about a given area. The size of the COI can positively influence the amount of content created or shared and, therefore, the benefit that individuals will gain from membership (Wirtz et al., 2013). COI group heterogeneity also positively influences the amount of contributions (Oliver, Marwell, & Teixeira, 1985) and benefits to members (Plant, 2004). For event and tourism research, it suggests that communities with these characteristics may be seen as more attractive to non-members as a source of eWOM.

Using COIs hosted on social media to understand eWOM

In this research, the COI created on twitter.com was analysed. Twitter has some advantages over Facebook and it has been used in research in a number of fields, including politics, business, sociology and epidemiology (Hardin, 2014). In the tourism domain, Twitter data has been used to examine online promotional strategies of destination organizations (Sevin, 2013). Twitter has also been analysed as an information distribution tool (Canhoto & Clark, 2013) or as a relationship-development tool (Jung et al., 2013). Unlike Facebook (www.Facebook.com), tweets are public by default (Marwick & Boyd, 2011) and users do not need a direct relationship to view and interact with content. Twitter users are, therefore, able to engage in information-seeking and response behaviour with a wider population of individuals than would be available from a platform comprising a mix of public and private discussions (Kwak, Lee, Park, & Moon, 2010) such as Facebook or Google Plus (Kane, Alavi, Labianca, & Borgatti, 2014).

Further, analysis of Twitter postings or tweets indicates that, rather than being merely personal, the content resembles a social history of the topic of interest (Vega, 2011), incorporating factual data, opinions and interactions (Humphreys, Gill, & Krishnamurthy, 2014). In contrast, while Facebook is a larger network, a significant amount of its content is private (Kabadayi & Price, 2014); moreover, researches conducted in these spaces are considered a violation of perceived user privacy. For example, Facebook has come under scrutiny (Verma, 2014) for research experiments conducted on a large sample of its user base (Coviello et al., 2014).

Table 1 Common Twitter conventions.

Twitter Convention	Description
@	Twitter accounts begin with '@' to share tweets which are public by default with the exception of users who have chosen to 'protect' their posts
Follow	To view the tweets of others, Twitter users can choose to 'follow' other accounts
@Account	Replies are a public message to a particular user that begins with the recipient's account @.
Mentions	Mentions are posts that contain the name of a user within the message, but not at the beginning as in the terms of Replies.
RT	Retweets is the sharing of another users' tweets to the accounts that follow your account
#	Hashtags (#) are a means of organizing content on twitter. Users who are following or monitoring the hashtag can see these postings even if they do not follow the user generating the tweet

Twitter overview

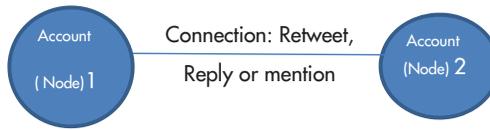
Twitter can be best described as a microblogging network that enables users to post updates known as tweets, which are limited to 140 characters and information interactions on Twitter include replies, mentions and retweets. A summary of common twitter activities is shown in [Table 1](#).

Social network analysis

To evaluate the nature of interactions and discussions of stakeholders in COIs, Social Network Analysis (SNA) may be an appropriate approach. SNA aggregates relationships formed between social networks within families, communities, organizations or countries that transmit information, distribute resources, coordinate activities and manage social norms (Latour, 2005). In this paradigm of research, configurations of relationships determine outcomes for entities (Rowley, 1997), which is in contrast with the variable paradigm of quantitative research that seeks to explain outcomes in terms of entity characteristics (Van De Ven & Huber, 1990); for example, eWOM propensity as a function of age and employment status.

In SNA, entities are modelled as nodes and relationships as connectors (Hogan, Carrasco, & Wellman, 2007). Nodes represent entities, such as families, cities, companies or countries whereas connectors are ties between nodes that can be classified by similarity, relationship, interaction or flow (Borgatti, Mehra, Brass, & Labianca, 2009). For COIs hosted on Twitter, nodes are twitter accounts and connectors are the eWOM information interactions of retweets, replies and mentions ([Figure 1](#)).

Research using SNA began with Sociometry in the 1930s and was an attempt to apply a physical science approach to social phenomena (Borgatti et al., 2009). Current work in the area adopts approaches from mathematics, social science or physics (Baggio, Scott, & Cooper, 2010).

Figure 1 Links in social networks.

The mathematical approach was adapted from graph theory and is used in management research to identify network structures that can influence economic outcomes, which are also known as social capital (Granovetter, 1973). It has also been used to identify influential academic ideas in domains such as marketing (Van Der Merwe, Berthon, Pitt, & Barnes, 2007). This approach has also been deployed in eWOM research to identify predictors of purchases (Abrantes, Seabra, Lages, & Jayawardhena, 2013).

Beyond network structures, the characteristics of nodes are also evaluated in this type of research as entities, such as companies or individuals, which may act as information brokers or constraints (Lo & Sheng-Wei, 2010). In marketing and tourism, SNA research (McLeod, Doolin, & MacDonell, 2012), the node characteristic of Centrality or the relationship of a given node to other nodes, is used to understand entity roles in a network. Nodes with a high degree of centrality are linked to a larger number of nodes and eWOM content shared by them will be more prominent than information shared by nodes that are less central. Central nodes are considered eWOM influencers (Chen, Tang, Wu, & Jheng, 2014) because they act as information brokers, connecting actors within and across clusters.

The social science approach to SNA attempts to develop a qualitative understanding node and network properties; for example, stakeholder positions on particular issues (Sharman, 2014). Finally, in the physics approach, SNA is used to examine complex emergent phenomena in macro-scale networks. However, unlike the mathematical approach, properties of individual nodes are not considered important.

Hallmark festivals and tourism destinations

Festivals are distinguished from other types of special event by their purpose, which is the celebration or expression of the historical, social or cultural aspects of a particular host community (Getz, 2008). While this is still true for many festivals, an increasing number of festivals incorporate economic and destination promotion objectives (Gold & Gold, 2005). Early research on the benefits of festivals to destinations identified their ability to reduce the impact of seasonality on demand by attracting off peak visitors (Ritchie & Beliveau, 1974). Subsequent research went further by examining the potential of festivals and events to develop a destination's overall competitive position (Jago, Dwyer, Lipman, Van Lill, & Vorster, 2010). Overall, research in this domain examines the direct and indirect financial impacts of festivals on destinations.

In the first area, the research examines the ability of festivals to directly increase revenue or reduce costs for destinations. Festivals can attract new customers, who will consume services and products at the destination (Getz, 2012). Further, these event

offerings can be used to target specific market segments, such as high-income tourists that travel to visit cultural festivals (Quinn, 2010). Others may deploy business events to attract professionals whilst music festivals can target a young audience (Smith, 2003). To reduce costs, festivals increase the utilisation of existing infrastructures as they do not necessarily require purpose-built facilities, enabling destinations to operate more efficiently by absorbing excess capacity (Gibson, Willming, & Holdnak, 2003). Festivals can also act as an animator of existing tourism facilities or historic sites (Yoo & Weber, 2005), creating more economic and leisure options.

In the second area, festivals indirectly enhance the long-term financial viability of a destination. Annual festivals may act as a core component of a destination product, enabling it to differentiate its offer against competitors (Getz, 2008). They can act as an image maker, creating a distinctive image for a previously unknown destination (Li & Vogelsong, 2006). In a related role, festivals can also act as a tool with which to re-brand an existing tourism destination (Quinn, 2005), supporting urban regeneration and renewal by attracting businesses to make long-term investments in the location (Waitt, 2008).

Social media may support these processes as it is used by attendees for sharing information with each other and non-attendees, as well as for documenting experiences (Hudson, Roth, Madden, & Hudson, 2015). Beyond these aspects, social media may also generate eWOM via real-time engagement by organisers whilst the event is being delivered (Oliveira & Panyik, 2015). Since the festival experience is co-created with customers, these interactions may further enhance eWOM about the destination.

eWOM, social media and communities of interest

Whilst eWOM researchers have begun to examine social media, they have used it primarily as a means to gain access to respondents for conventional quantitative or qualitative research. For the former, researchers have used survey methodologies to evaluate the nature of customer motivation to engage in eWOM (Wolny & Mueller, 2013). Others have examined visitor (Canhoto & Clark, 2013) or hotel owner (Jung et al., 2013) characteristics by conducting interviews with social media users. More recently, research has directly sought to understand the nature of eWOM concerning brands (Jansen et al., 2009) and destinations by using manual content analysis of Twitter postings and the account profiles of marketers (Lasarte, 2014). Researchers have also explored the application of automated text analysis to eWOM on social media (Lu & Stepchenkova, 2014). However, these approaches do not facilitate understanding of relational structures that influence eWOM.

Similarly, while SNA has been previously applied in tourism and marketing researches, they have used conventional, survey-based methods (Baggio et al., 2010) that do not enable evaluation of a complete COI (Luo & Zhong, 2015). Further, little attempt has been made to understand the content of discussions within complete networks. Analysis of a complete COI has the potential to develop additional insights for marketers. Specifically, it enables researchers to examine structural (configurations of relationships) and node (influential individuals) characteristics that influence eWOM about a destination while a festival is being staged. Moreover, evaluation of the content can provide additional insight into the

nature of eWOM within the COI. The next section describes the research questions that will guide the rest of this study.

Research questions

This research has been designed to explore the structure and content of online narratives shared within a COI hosted on Twitter regarding a destination when a hallmark event is being staged. As previous research has adopted survey-based data collection methods, the nature of relational structures formed within complete eWOM COIs hosted on social media is not yet known (Ma & Agarwal, 2007; Schultze & Orlikowski, 2010).

Generally, user interactions via COIs form a power-law distribution of connections among users (Newman, 2001), in which a few users attract a large and disproportionate number of social and informational ties (Huberman, Romero, & Wu, 2008). Clusters or subgroups may develop around these users in which connections within the cluster are denser than those outside (Carrington, Scott, & Wasserman, 2005). The presence of such clusters may indicate the presence of stakeholder groups (e.g. 'visitors' or 'online observers') in the overall COI. In this way, it is possible to identify groups based on their information-sharing behaviour within the network. It may, therefore, enable analyses based on the interests and actions of online stakeholders of the festival and tourism destination, rather than working with an *a priori* designation that may not be appropriate for the destination under study. Whilst distinct hubs and clusters of this nature have been identified in previous research in politics and marketing research (Himmelboim, Smith, & Shneiderman, 2013), it is still not known if similar patterns exist in the eWOM generated by festivals and tourism destinations. The first research question is, therefore:

RQ1: What are the structural characteristics of eWOM within a COI generated by destination stakeholders when a festival is being staged?

Whilst social media platforms enable peer-to-peer connections by individuals, many dominant members of online communities are media industry professionals and celebrities (Graeff, Stempeck, & Zuckerman, 2014). For eWOM, the source of information may be as important as the content of the message itself (Wu, Hofman, Mason, & Watts, 2011). It is, therefore, necessary to understand the characteristics of key actors in these hubs to identify whether the narratives are developed and sustained by individual visitors and residents or are a part of a larger framing by commercial or activist organisations (Loader, Vromen, & Xenos, 2014). The presence of the latter may indicate that the festival is merely an extension of existing marketing efforts whereas the former may suggest a peer-to-peer COI between potential and current visitors was developed. In addition to background, geographic location is also important. For example, community festivals will have a primarily local or regional audience (Getz, 2008) whilst international festivals may have a wider geographic range of physical and, possibly, online participants. This may be reflected in the characteristics of the key individuals engaging in eWOM on social media.

Consequently, the research question is:

RQ2: what are the characteristics of key stakeholders in the COI?

In addition to the nature of users discussing the festival and destination on Twitter, the content of their discussions can indicate if the festival stimulated eWOM about the destination. Social media sharing tourism information may incorporate official content from organisers along with attendee or visitor-generated content (Hamid-Turksoy, Kuipers, & Van Zoonen, 2013). Additionally, social media accommodates a range of perspectives about the event and destination that may differ from official representations (Lim, Chung, & Weaver, 2012). However, it is not yet known which tourism destination or event characteristics are discussed by customers within COIs (Sun, Ryan, & Pan, 2014). Therefore, it is necessary to understand the topics discussed by key stakeholders within COI clusters (Guerrero-Solé & Fernández-Cavia, 2013), which results in the following question:

RQ3: What are the topics of discussion within these clusters?

Research setting

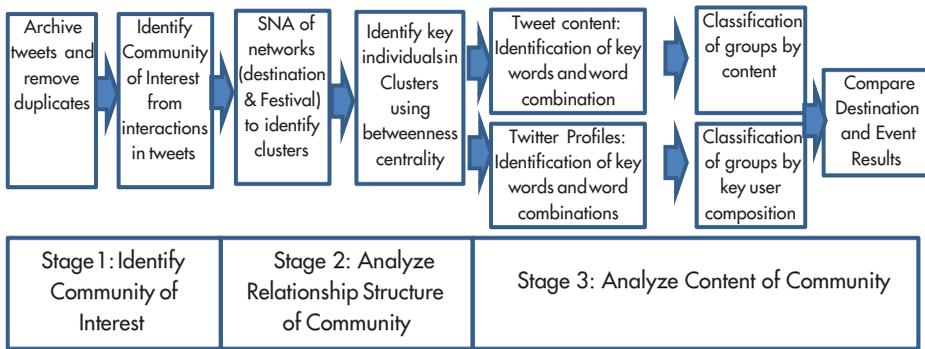
In order to tackle the above research questions, a study was conducted of the twitter.com conversations about a tourism destination in which a hallmark event was being staged. The chosen destination is Bournemouth and the event was the Bournemouth Air Festival 2013. Situated on the south coast of England, Bournemouth has a 200-year history as a purpose-built resort (www.Bournemouth.co.uk). Bournemouth has some 15,500 bed spaces and over 100 attractions and places of historical interest within a one-hour drive. The visitor economy employs one in every six people in Bournemouth and generates a gross income exceeding £500 million every year. In 2008, Bournemouth created the Bournemouth Air Festival as a new annual event. The event now draws an estimated audience of 1.4 million over four days and three nights and it has an economic impact of £30 m. The Air Festival audience comprises locals as well as visitors from across the United Kingdom and Europe, attracting ABC1, C2 and D (middle class and lower class) people of all ages and social groups (www.Bournemouthair.co.uk).

Not only is the Bournemouth Air Festival one of the largest in the United Kingdom, but it also requires a high degree of live coordination and communication via social media. As an outdoor event that depends on the performance of stunt aircraft, the weather is of paramount importance as it determines the type of aircraft that can operate, the nature of acrobatics and the type of stunts performed. Furthermore, crowd control is critical as organisers wish to communicate with festival goers, updating them on changes to the programme and engaging them in conversation in real time. As these contextual factors influence the programme and customer satisfaction, the event, therefore, involves heavy use of real-time social media, including Twitter, and is a good subject for examining eWOM.

Research methodology

Research into COIs is highly complex because perspectives interact at the macro (structural features of community) and micro-levels (individual actors) (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999). A research approach was designed that combines SNA and text analysis to examine the COI for the event and destination. [Figure 2](#) provides an overview:

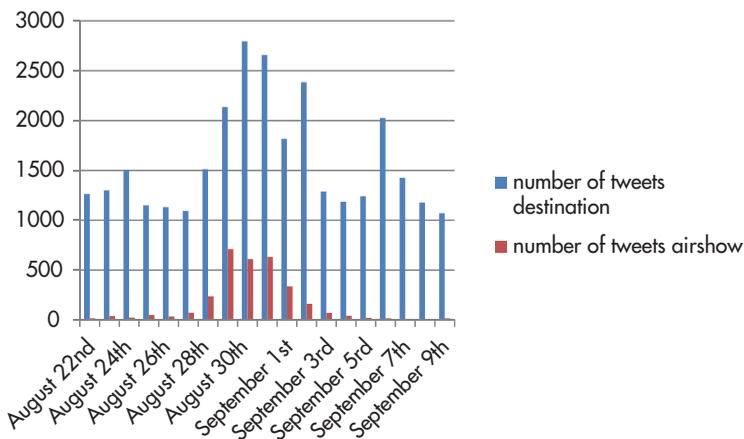
Figure 2 Overview of the research method.



Stage 1: Identification of COI

In order to operationalize SNA, a series of search terms and hashtags was selected and archived using the online service Tweet Archivist (www.tweetarchivist.com); this was selected since the service’s upper limit of 18,000 tweets per day is higher than the volume of traffic about the destination or event, which was less than 5000 tweets per day. Even though current twitter.com research relies heavily on postings organized by hashtags (Weber, Garimella, & Teka, 2013), users may post without these tools. To ensure a wide range of tweets was captured, we also used search terms to archive relevant tweets. For the Festival, postings related to the search terms ‘Bournemouth Air Festival’ and ‘Bournemouth Air Show’ were archived along with the event hashtags promoted by the organiser of ‘#BmnthAirFest’ and ‘#NightAir’. For the destination, we used the search term ‘Bournemouth’ and ‘#bournemouth’. Terms were archived for one month before the event (August 1st) until one month after the Festival (September 31st 2013). However, an analysis of the traffic (Figure 3) shows that, as there was no Festival-specific traffic the week before the event (August 22nd 2013) and very little the

Figure 3 Number of collected tweets over time.



week after the Festival (September 9th 2013), a two-week period was selected because the focus of the study was to explore Festival and Tourism Destination eWOM. Figure 3 indicates that the Air Festival represented 10% of all tweets during the period, with the most significant effect occurring during the days in which the air show was staged.

Following this, event and destination tweets were consolidated and any duplicates in each category were removed.

Stage 2: Analysis of the relationship structure of the community

Tweets were then filtered to identify the underlying information relationships between users in the form of 'Replies', 'Retweets' and 'Mentions'. These forms of relationships between users were then modelled as two unweighted directed networks (destination and festival) using the open source SNA tool NodeXL (<http://nodexl.codeplex.com/>). NodeXL is a free tool with analysis and visualization capabilities that was used to model the overall network as well as to identify underlying clusters using the Clauset Newman–Moore clustering algorithm, selected for its ability to efficiently identify subgroups in large network data sets (Clauset, Newman, & Moore, 2004). The distinctiveness of clusters in the COI was identified using the modularity statistic (Newman, 2004) that has values ranging between zero and one, with higher values indicating more distinct hubs or clusters. Further work (Zhou, Wang, & Wang, 2012) has indicated that 0.4 is a sufficient metric for identifying clusters and that clusters beyond 0.6 do not exhibit further meaningful distinctiveness.

This research, therefore, used 0.4 as a basis for accepting that meaningful clusters exist and 0.6 to indicate a high degree of clustering. Once the existence of clusters was confirmed, they were ranked by size or the number of users assigned to each. After ranking, the betweenness centrality measure was used to identify key users within clusters (Dugué & Perez, 2014). Finally, we examined the extent to which networks were linked to each other by examining the number of event-information network members belonging to the overall Bournemouth network.

Stage 3: Content analysis in the COI

Quantitative and qualitative text analyses were then conducted on the content of the tweets within the clusters. Keyword frequency analysis was first performed on the Twitter content shared within clusters identified in stage 2. Frequently used words were identified using Voyant (www.Voyant-Tools.org), an open source package that analyses text data. Voyant was used to analyse the text using statistics for the frequency, Z score and normalized use per 10,000 words, which enabled comparison across hubs that may have different volumes of discussion (Graesser, Jeon, Yan, & Cai, 2007). The highest ranked 100 words by raw and normalized frequency were identified in each hub and reviewed to determine terms that relate to specific Bournemouth destination elements. Once identified, keywords related to destination elements, such as 'Beach' and 'Pier', were reviewed qualitatively using a keyword in a context tool to understand the nature and intent of discussions around keywords (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2007). A qualitative review of the profile information of the top twenty users by betweenness centrality was conducted. The combined output from Social Network Analysis and text analysis was used to classify the groups in both the destination network and the Festival network.

The use of social network sites, such as twitter.com, is relatively new for research purposes; however, this research adopts several suggestions made by previous research to improve validity (Tufekci, 2014). The first is that data collection did not focus on hashtags only, but incorporated search terms to ensure that all relevant data would be captured, ensuring a complete COI (Bruns & Stieglitz, 2012). The second was the utilisation of multiple methods to compensate for the weaknesses of any single approach (Herdağdelen, Zuo, Gard-Murray, & Bar-Yam, 2013).

Results and analysis

Following the research design outlined above, monitoring started one week before the Festival and ended one week afterward. Focusing on the identified research questions, the results and analysis are as follows:

RQ1: What are the structural characteristics of eWOM within a COI generated by destination stakeholders when a hallmark event is being staged?

The data set related to Bournemouth as a tourism destination resulted in 30,161 tweets (Figure 4), whilst the data set related to the event contained 3121 tweets (Figure 5). These COI interactions were then modelled as two networks with the characteristics shown below.

Overview of networks in COI

Figure 4 shows the five largest subgroups in the Bournemouth destination network, consisting of 27,982 nodes (i.e. number of Twitter accounts) connected by 30,102 information interactions (retweets, replies and mentions).

Figure 5 shows the five largest subgroups and 2158 vertices for the Air Show with a number of unique edges (unique tweet content) of 3199 respectively.

Each group in the above diagrams represents a cluster with larger clusters on the left. The top five clusters are presented for each network since they comprised the majority of accounts and interactions. For example, cluster 1 in the Destination network represented 11,034 activities, which is more than 1/3 of the network;

Figure 4 Destination social network. Modularity: 0.756965.

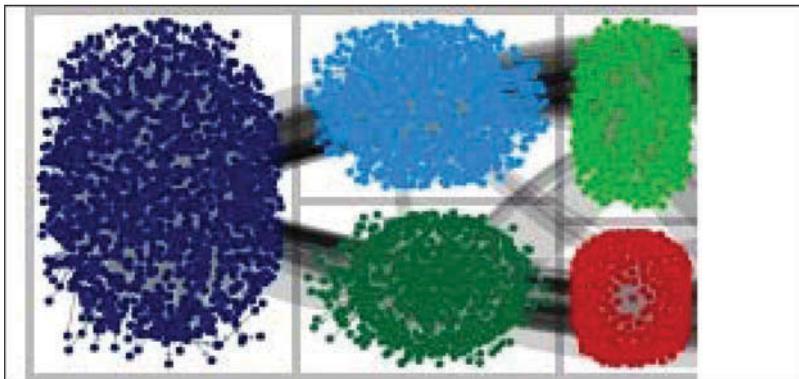
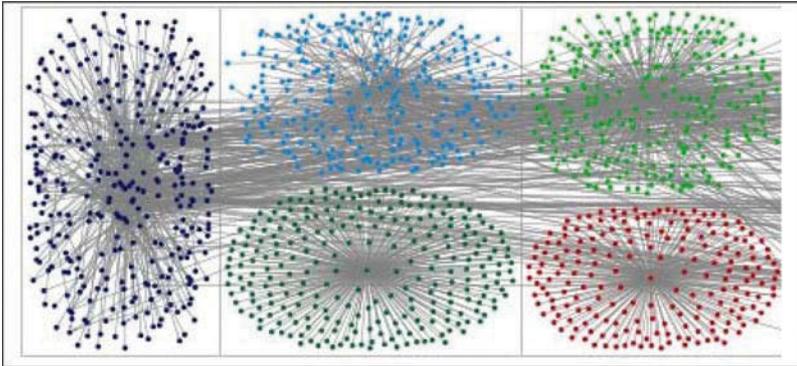


Figure 5 Bournemouth Air Festival social network. Modularity: 0.582485.



meanwhile, cluster 1 in the Festival network consisted of 1501 accounts. There is a significant amount of overlap between the destination and Festival networks as 2/3 of all air show interactions and 1481 Twitter users were contained in group 1 of the destination network. Overall, results indicate that both networks show a high degree of modularity – 0.756965 for the destination and 0.582485 for the Festival – indicating that distinct clusters were formed.

RQ2: what are the characteristics of key stakeholders in the COI?

The Twitter profiles of the top 20 users, based on the highest betweenness centrality, were archived and used to classify the cluster (Kilduff & Krackhardt, 1994). Table 2 provides examples of the key individuals for Group 1 of the destination and event.

The above example, drawn from Group 1, reveals that the dominant individuals in this group were primarily media professionals, government sources or performers.

RQ3: What are the topics of discussion within these clusters?

The content of tweets in each group was extracted and processed using Voyant to identify commonly used words and phrases. These data were aggregated into themes presented below in Table 3:

Key words that infer a destination feature were explored further using a Keyword in Context tool to understand the way in which the term was used. Finally, findings from the content analysis and text analysis (qualitative and quantitative) were integrated into Table 4 to classify the hubs by content and user characteristics.

Discussion

eWOM hosted on social media has been proposed as a critical component of customer engagement with tourism destinations (So, King, Sparks, & Wang, 2014). Festivals may generate eWOM, which can attract new visitors, appeal to targeted audiences or change the perception of a destination (Hudson & Hudson, 2013). To understand the structure and nature of eWOM in the COI around the destination

Table 2 Key users in Group 1 of destination and festival networks.

Bournemouth location				Bournemouth air festival			
Twitter Account	Classification	Betweenness Centrality	Twitter Account	Classification	Betweenness Centrality		
BmthAirFest	Organizer	22311930.3	RichardBmthEcho	Media	313,536.3253		
wave105radio	Media	18556419.22	robertthomas493	Performer	224,121.7825		
Bournemouthcho	Media	16728028.66	bournemouthbc	Government Office	158,417.386		
RAFRedFour	Performer	12102870.86	airfestv	Organizer	121,813.0209		
achrisevans	Media	11057550.35	SteveSmithEcho	Media	110,999.7984		
suzidixon77	Media	9982613.33	CaitlinM_Echo	Media	106,585.4327		
bournemouthbc	Government office	7459671.829	CorinDailyEcho	Media	105,170.7974		
rafredarrows	Performer	5489939.298	RAFRed10	Performer	48,360.28848		
djblakie	Performer	5361732.253	limetreecomms	Media	30,653.04948		
robertthomas493	Performer	3895710.425	SallyDailyEcho	Media	27,551.8388		
leeseal31	Individual	3801507.332	buhaliid	Individual	27,116.64928		
mandyw6	Individual	3305701.459	RivaSouthbourne	Media	24,187.67104		
XH558	Performer	3192338.457	shep6h6	Individual	20,148.94117		
airfestv	Organizer	3151779.431	TyphoonDisplay	Performer	20,107.68611		
BBCDorset	Media	2993107.178	Winter_Alex	Media	20,053.08334		
MarialMawson	Media	2803060.904	Eurofighter_1	Performer	18,954.54666		
DoMoreMagazine	Media	2574524.313	OakhamUK	Media	16,787.52639		
bepo836	Government office	2382962.345	Up_To_Speed	Media	16,736.01405		
szq98	Individual	2226775.339	Dorset_News	Media	16,566.86487		

Table 3 Group discussion themes.

Group number	Bournemouth location main themes	Bournemouth air festival main themes
1	Content discussed in hubs Dominated by conversations about the air festival and related issues. Over 2/3 of the Air Festival's vertices are contained within Group 1	Content discussed in hubs Dominated by official media coverage by Bournemouth Media
2	Football Related topics of discussion including rival teams and players.	Dominated by discussions of Night Air Concert staged as part of the Air Festival
3	Narratives on Music related topics. Fans and Performers at Night Air and other music acts	Bournemouth media discussions of non-Air Festival topics
4	Discussion of location by visitors to Air festival	Fans of bands and performers at Night Air Concert
5	Discussions on events and parties in the Bournemouth Location. Service providers, minor celebrities	Bournemouth Blog community

when an event is being staged, this research applied a new method combining SNA and text analysis.

Overall, the modularity metric of both COI analyses indicate that both the destination (Bournemouth) and Air Festival Twitter networks form distinct clusters. This supports the findings from previous research into political engagement (Conover, Gonçalves, Flammini, & Menczer, 2012) and suggests the structure of social media-based eWOM can be similar to other forms of online discussions. As social media is a growing source of travel information, particularly among younger tourists (Xiang et al., 2015), this is a useful insight into the similarities of online engagement across domains that supports research.

Key users in cluster 1 of the Air Festival, along with clusters 3, 4 and 5 of the destination, were found to be groups and individuals with significant previous online or offline presence, such as performers or media professionals. This is in contrast with earlier views of online communities that suggested that open, easily accessible platforms would result in an increased presence of non-prominent individuals (Plant, 2004).

Previously, researchers (Hauben & Hauben, 1998; Rheingold, 1993) have assumed the internet would democratise access to information and promote a broad range of perspectives on any given issue by exposing users to views from outside their physical/offline social networks (McKenna & Bargh, 2000). Similarly, tourism researchers have indicated that open access to information would remove the need for information intermediaries, allowing potential visitors to make decisions without influence from marketers (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999).

However, later research identified the filtering capabilities of the Internet and the ability of users to curate their information feeds (Gergen, 2008). This purposefully limits their perspectives to sources that match their interests. This filtering effect has been identified in early research on online communications (McPherson, Smith-

Table 4 Group classification compared.

Group no	Bournemouth location		Bournemouth air festival	
	Characteristics of users in hubs	Location of users in hubs	Characteristics of users in hub	Location of users in hubs
1	Bournemouth residents and users	Bournemouth region (Dorset) terms mentioned most often. Little evidence of users from outside the United Kingdom	Official Bournemouth media accounts and twitter accounts of media personnel/performers	Bournemouth region (Dorset) terms mentioned most often. Little evidence of users from outside the United Kingdom
2	Fans of football teams	Highly international. Dominated by users from Europe.	Music fans	Bournemouth region (Dorset) terms mentioned most often. Little evidence of users from outside the United Kingdom
3	Official band accounts and accounts of fans	Highly international. Dominated by users from Europe.	Bournemouth media	Bournemouth region (Dorset) terms mentioned most often. Little evidence of users from outside the United Kingdom
4	Discussion of location by performer (Westlife, 40% of terms) and visitors to Air festival. Mentions made of the beach, sunshine and food (<1%).	Dominated by non-Bournemouth UK residents	Fans of bands	Bournemouth region (Dorset) terms mentioned most often. Little evidence of users from outside the United Kingdom
5	Accounts of service providers, event organisers, venues	Dominated by Bournemouth and UK residents	Accounts of support services, charities	Bournemouth region (Dorset) terms mentioned most often. Little evidence of users from outside the United Kingdom

Lovin, & Cook, 2001) and has also been examined in related work on Twitter usage by brands (Pfeffer, Zorbach, & Carley, 2014). Whilst current research suggests that eWOM on social media would be generated in a peer-to-peer manner (Hudson et al., 2015) and modularity could, therefore, be low, the high modularity finding of this research indicates otherwise.

Further, whilst previous tourism research has identified the need for potential visitors to manage their information sources (Buhalis & Law, 2008), it was suggested that curation would be effected using software algorithms. As an open platform, Twitter has few options for managing exposure to information. This research suggests that, in the absence of such tools, members of the Twitter COI are undertaking this filtering through their approach to sharing posts. Faced with the wide range of opinions, information and perspectives, Twitter users may be purposefully limiting their sources to official or prominent ones, suggesting that while communication has been democratised, attention has not. The result is that online clusters are formed around these users rather than ordinary individuals and content shared within the clusters may be dominated by their perspectives.

Overall, the presence of distinct clusters properly enabled the dimensioning and analysis of both networks (destination and Festival) within the COI and three dimensions may provide a useful basis for analysis and discussion, which are the size (volume of tweets), span (pattern of topic engagement) and the scope (geographic range of engaged stakeholders).

The size (volume of tweets)

Overall, the relatively low volume of tweets that directly mention the festival (>3000), as compared to the search term (>30,000), may suggest that the Air Show did not have a very strong presence in online discussions about the destination when it was staged. Specifically, when compared to the estimated festival visitor numbers of >1,000,000, as compared to the town's annual visitor numbers of 5,000,000, this number seems relatively low. This would indicate that the tourism destination COI is more influential than the festival COI to casual observers on Twitter (Wirtz et al., 2013). However, text analysis of the discussions in the destination search term indicated a strong presence of festival-related terms. Further, the destination aspects that were frequently mentioned within the COI, for example, the beach, were embedded within discussions initiated by a performer at the festival or in the context of an event activity.

This suggests that, in addition to animating physical tourism destination facilities, (Weidenfeld & Leask, 2013), the influence of events extend online to stimulate online discussions about a destination. However, due to the clustering effect of social networks, this animation is provided via a narrow range of sources, many of which have a financial stake in the success of the event and destination. Even though Twitter is an open platform, the ability to share content without restrictions did not mean that other users would engage with postings. As a result, event eWOM may merely be an extension of existing online or traditional marketing efforts for the destination. Even though no research using Twitter as a data source has yet identified such an effect, this finding is similar to previous research using Facebook (Kwok & Yu, 2013).

Scope

There is a significant amount of overlap between the location and festival networks, as 2/3 of all Air Show narratives – 1481 twitter users – were contained in both information networks (RQ1). The Air Show stream is dominated by local media agencies and local stakeholders promoting products and services (RQ2). This is confirmed by analysis of the topics within the discussion (RQ3): the destination stream is characterised by general discussion topics by visitors and residents, such as football and local events, while the Air Show stream had a significant component of coverage by Bournemouth media. This indicates that the Festival had a local focus, which is not in alignment with its media promotion as an international event. The Air Show contrasts with the destination network in which tourists and residents dominate the discussion. Further, the destination network has attracted far more overall engagement from Twitter users located outside of Dorset and this finding is somewhat in contrast with existing research suggesting that the reverse should occur (Weidenfeld & Leask, 2013).

However, the influence of the Festival on the destination narratives suggests that whilst the Festival did not directly attract online tourist attention, it did act as a means to influence perceptions about the destination. The mentions of destination features or experiences by prominent individuals were heavily shared within both networks. This may generate eWOM that can influence future customers who did not attend the event but are fans of the celebrity.

The span (pattern of topic engagement)

Further, online engagement of the Air Show and destination followed a ‘broadcast’ pattern in which content from official stakeholders was distributed to other members of the hub (Himmelboim et al., 2013). The most prominent users, based on betweenness centrality, were the media, performers and government officials, who would act as emergent information brokers (Rowley, 1997) both within and outside of the cluster. eWOM may have been influenced by these perspectives, which would have been aligned with their interests. It may also indicate that opposing opinions about the event or festival may not have been shared. This structure is similar to company-managed forums (Zaglia, 2013) in which organizations host a COI using their IT infrastructure. This research extends existing knowledge to suggest that such structures may emerge on open platforms, such as Twitter.

Further, the high degree of clustering suggests that users were not exposed to content outside their cluster, as there were far more connections within clusters than outside them. This further limits the ability of COI members to engage with a diverse range of opinions (Kwak et al., 2010). Consequently, the span of topic engagement in this research is considered relatively low as there was a limited range of perspectives and limited potential for interaction outside of the network cluster or hub.

Theoretical and practical contribution

The findings make both theoretical and practical contributions. The first theoretical contribution is confirmation that stakeholders form coherent communication and content clusters when discussing event and destination-related topics on Twitter. This finding is similar to earlier research on politics (HerdaĀdelen et al., 2013). This finding is

useful for researchers in the marketing and tourism domains, as it suggests that SNA of COIs can be applied to directly examine social media-based eWOM and complex phenomena, such as firm-customer engagement in brand communities (Cova & White, 2010). As the process adopts a census or whole network approach, it may be useful for identifying characteristics of subgroups within these communities that may be overlooked by convenience or probability sampling in survey-based methodologies.

Whilst Twitter has emerged as a popular platform for conducting research, partially due to its open, public nature, findings suggest that the behaviour of individuals does not necessarily follow the predicted patterns of peer-to-peer engagement. In this study, Twitter users showed a preference for content from prominent users, who became the brokers of the network due to their high centrality. These users were, therefore, in a position to shape eWOM in the COI to achieve their objectives – not necessarily the open exchange of ideas that Twitter is meant to provide. This indicates that perspectives of Twitter as ‘open’ and Facebook as ‘closed’ require some examination. Even though Twitter does not perform the same algorithmic moderation of content as Facebook, emergent, relational mechanisms in the COI acted to create patterns of eWOM based on famous individuals. Additional research should be conducted on eWOM in social media to see if COIs arising from information interactions constrain diverse opinions, as well as enabling them.

Finally, findings suggest that festivals perform an animator role in both the offline and online domains. This is an extension to existing work suggesting that events act as an animator of destination infrastructure (O’Sullivan & Jackson, 2002). This finding also indicates that, as events are a component of a destination’s traffic when staged and that these events act to stimulate discussions in the main destination network, future research methodologies may opt to simply monitor destination social media search terms and it may not be necessary to monitor event traffic separately.

Finally, the 3 S framework (scale, scope and span) can be used to compare destination-related COIs. Current event and festival research is constrained by the implicit assumption that all events are unique (Getz et al., 2010). However, the 3 S framework suggests that the online network of a festival may be a useful basis for comparison. The analysis suggests the Air Festival was an extension of other promotional efforts, a finding which may lie in its origin as a promotional vehicle for the destination. However, community-based activities, such as carnivals or cultural events (Getz, 2012), may have differing characteristics as they are rooted in a historical context that may be manifested in the patterns of eWOM generated.

It may be necessary for industry stakeholders to take a holistic view of online engagement created by the event and to examine direct interactions from the event, as well as the ones encouraged in wider destination conversations. Current practice monitors crude numerical metrics, such as number of tweets, as proxies for engagement (Hudson & Hudson, 2013), which may be misleading if the structure of the network is unknown. Adoption of more sophisticated approaches incorporating SNA metrics, such as centrality, may provide a more accurate picture of online engagement, resulting in actionable insights for the firm. Finally, destinations wishing to reach international audiences via events may find it is necessary to incorporate explicit international elements, such as international performers, in order to encourage a wider geographic span of impact.

For festival managers, adoption of social media analyses based on COI network structures can improve the staging of public events and generate further positive eWOM. Overall, this suggests that understanding of network structures can enable

top-down management of eWOM, which is in contrast with existing research that encourages a bottom-up approach (Luo & Zhong, 2015). Content shared by key or prominent individuals dominate attention in the network and can be used to align eWOM with promotional objectives. This analysis can be deployed before the event to aid better forecasting of demand and to set customer expectations. During the event, analysis of social media can aid crowd coordination, along with real-time sharing of information and content with advertisers. Finally, post-event information can be optimally disseminated using knowledge of network structures to keep stakeholders engaged until the next event.

This exploratory study has limitations due to the nature of the online platform used and its methodology. The first is that it is based on a single festival and destination; therefore, additional research is required to determine if the clustering observed here occurs in different types of festivals, such as carnivals. Further, Twitter has demographic characteristics that were useful for this research (Hardin, 2014) but may not be useful for other types of festival audiences, such as older or lower-income individuals. However, these limitations do not reduce the article's contribution of demonstrating that social media-hosted eWOM content and structure can be analysed directly and jointly to provide useful insights for destination and festival managers. Future research can utilise individual or comparative approaches, as well as differing types of festivals and destinations, to understand the applicability of the 3S model to these settings. Additional research may also seek to measure the scale of such an effect by adopting a quasi-experimental or longitudinal approach to evaluate online COIs before, during and after the event.

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