



The Influence of Digital Storytelling on the Customer Journey for Vacation Trips of the Austrian Generation Y





Introduction



Problem definition

The internet has drastically changed the way in which tourists search for information, buy, consume and evaluate products and services^{3, 6, 7}. Social media and social networks, e.g. Facebook, Instagram, profit off the fact that every user can share and connect with any information or person whenever they want^{13, 15}. In the tourism industry **social networks** have become an **important information and inspiration source** for potential travelers and tend to **replace traditional information sources**, as travelers value the opinion and experiences of other tourists which are communicated on social networks^{8, 13, 16}. As a result of social networks the **customer journey** of vacation travelers are **increasingly complex** and tourists are confronted with more information every day^{1, 4}. Due to this companies **struggle** with **differentiating** themselves and their products **under the mass of information** on the social networks. With the use of **Digital Storytelling** as a communication tool, companies can still **address people emotionally** and **stand out from the crowd** of competitors. Since information in stories can be perceived as **discreet** and **truthful** and triggers an emotional reaction that stores the information longer in the mind of the perceiver and ideally **forms an emotional bond** between the company and tourist^{1, 14, 11, 5}. Especially in leisure tourism, like vacation trips, emotions play an important role in every step and decision along the customer journey².

However, as it is the core of social media it is not only companies that engage in Digital Storytelling via social networks, but also users themselves through User Generated Content (**UGC**) and electronic Word-of-Mouth (**eWOM**) by sharing their **personal stories and experiences**, which shapes the brand's message and perception^{10, 11, 12, 14, 18}.

Relevance

Therefore, it is vital to **examine** the **customer journey holistically** to design and manage the **quality of the customer experience** leading to UGC and eWOM^{9, 17}. Especially the **Generation Y**, a large user group of social networks, that has been identified as very eager to travel, is therefore **important to address** with marketing measure on the channel of social networks.

Research objectives

Based on recent scientific literature and quantitative research, the **main objective** of this paper is to examine the influence of Digital Storytelling via social networks on the customer journey of vacations trips of the Austrian Generation Y and therefore answer the following research question:

? *What influence does Digital Storytelling via social networks have on the customer journey for vacation trips of the Austrian Generation Y in 2022?* **?**

In total 10 hypotheses are derived from the theoretical framework, which need to be tested empirically. Figure 1 shows the hypotheses supporting the research questions and how the variables are connected:

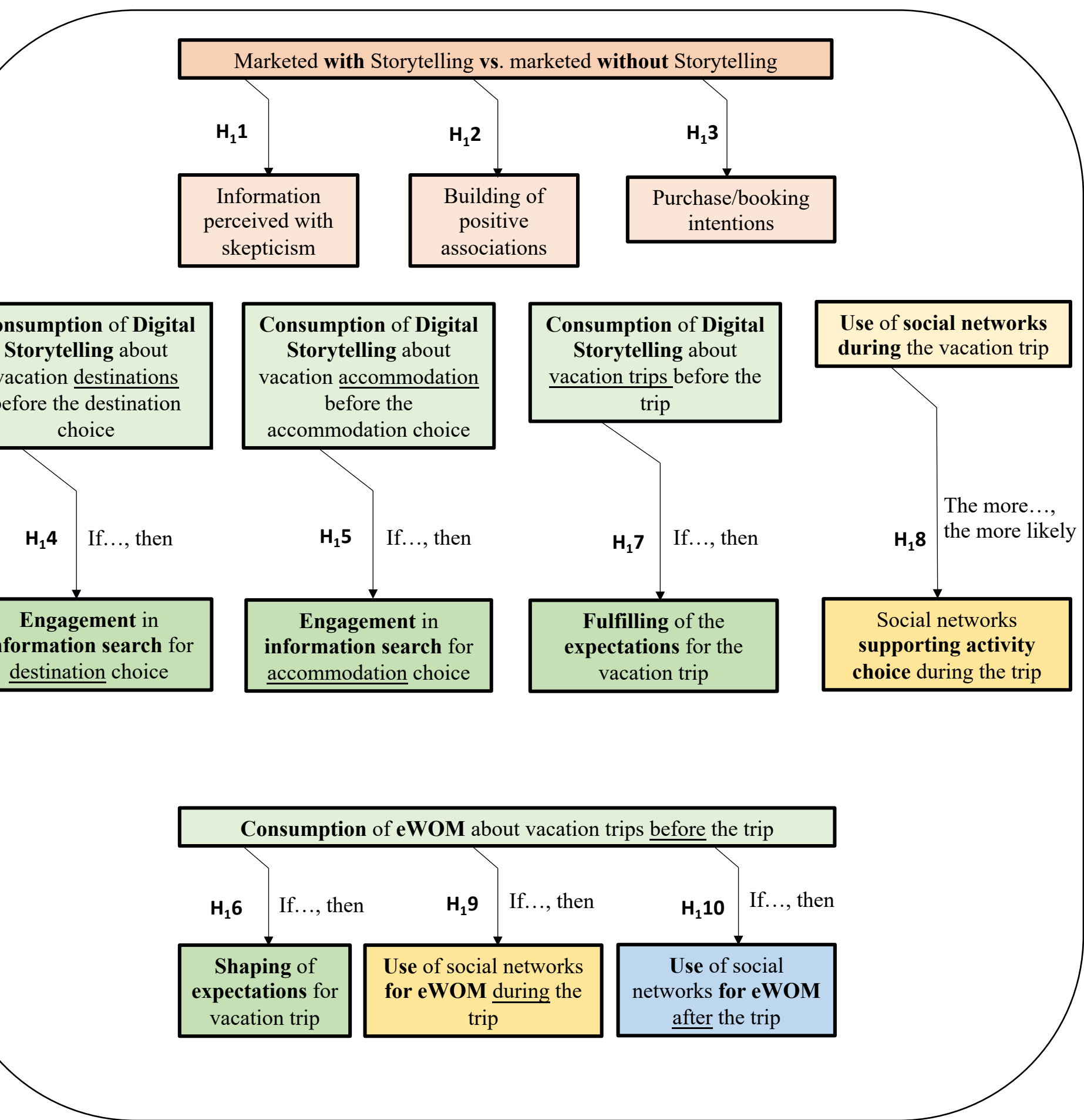


Figure 1: Hypotheses and their connections

Methodology

Research Design

This paper works **deductive**, meaning an existing theory is tested with empirical research. The theoretical part of this paper, from which the hypotheses originate, is developed through literature research and analysis. Based on the developed theory, a **quantitative, correlational research design** has been identified as the best fit to test the hypotheses.

Sampling



Population:
Austrian Generation Y
(Birth years 1980-2000)



Sample:
Quota sample of 386 Austrian
Generation Y individuals
(51,1% male, 48,9% female)

Respondents are selected for the sample in compliance with the quotas using **snowball recruiting** by further disseminating the survey instrument **on social networks** to obtain respondents who meet the **research criteria**:

1. Age group of the Generation Y
2. Residency in Austria in 2022
3. Uses social networks
4. Went on a vacation trip in the past 3 years



Instrument of data collection

The instrument that is used for this survey is a **Computer Assisted Web Interview** (CAWI) with a high degree of standardization to be able to unify and objectify the results.



Structure & content of the questionnaire

1. **Short introduction** of the content of the survey and five general questions **filtering** out the individuals not meeting the **research criteria**.
2. Respondents are asked to **think back to a vacation trip** and its **planning process** that they can remember well as the following question are based on that. In the following the respondents' **consumption behavior** of various **Digital Storytelling content** from companies, brands etc. or other users via social networks before, during and after their trip and their **decision behavior, sharing behavior** on social networks and their **expectations** regarding the past vacation trip is queried.
3. Two freely invented **input texts** about **two destinations** with different names and **same characteristics**, where input A is a marketing text without storytelling and input B is a marketing text with the use of storytelling. Respondents are asked to put themselves in the situation of having come across these two texts during their everyday use of social networks. The same questions are asked about each of these two inputs to find out what influence the use of storytelling has on the corresponding variables.

Quality criteria

To ensure the **compliance** with all **statistical quality criteria** prior to the field phase of the research, a **field pretest** is carried out, which corresponds to the conditions of the field phase and tested the questionnaire on a smaller group (approx. 10-15 persons) corresponding to the characteristics of the sample. This reveals any problems in understanding the questions, response categories, and technical procedure, and could thus be resolved before the field phase.

Analysis

For the analysis frequency-tables, Wilcoxon-Test, significance tests and correlation coefficients are used to be able to determine the applicability of the sample to the population.

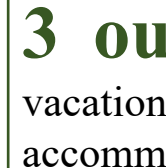
Results

9 out of 10 hypotheses are supported – H₁₇ is not supported

Pre-Trip Phase



71,2% of the Austrian Generation Y **search actively for information** during their vacation **destination choice** if they have consumed digital storytelling about vacation destinations beforehand.



3 out of 4 of the Austrian Generation Y **engage actively in information search** for vacation **accommodations** if they have consumed digital storytelling about vacation accommodations before this decision process



More engagement during information search and decision process = **more touchpoints** along the customer journey with brands or companies



The **expectations** for a vacation trip of **every second person** of the Austrian Generation Y are **influenced by stories from other users** they have consumed on the social networks before the trip



During-the-Trip Phase



51,2% of those **using social networks during the trip** are **supported** by stories from other users when **deciding on activities** during the trip.



Consumption of **eWOM** before the trip causes **every second person** of the Austrian Generation Y to **share their experiences** in form of stories on social networks **during** the trips.



After-the-Trip Phase



38,4% of those that consume **eWOM** before the trip, also **share their experiences** in form of stories on social networks **after** the trip.



3 out of 4, who **do not consume eWOM** before the trip also **do not share eWOM** on social networks **after** the trip



Marketed with Storytelling vs. marketed without Storytelling



Less skepticism for information communicated **with storytelling** than without.



Posts on social networks **with storytelling** are **more likely to trigger positive associations** for the product or brand presented than a post without storytelling.



Purchase/booking intention is **higher** within the Austrian Generation Y when marketing **with storytelling** is used than without.



Conclusion

The literary examination of the topic and the empirical research based on it have shown that the Austrian Generation Y is **influenced** by Digital Storytelling in their customer journey for vacation trips, **especially** in the "**pre-trip**" **phase**, in that the consumption of Digital Storytelling **increases engagement in the active search for information**, which in turn creates **more touchpoints** along the customer journey. Austrian Generation Y individuals feel **less skepticism** for information marketed with storytelling, and **positive associations** are more likely to be triggered for the product or brand presented, which also **increases purchase/booking intentions** when marketed **with storytelling**.

In addition, the **expectations** that are usually formed before the trip are **shaped by the stories of other users** on the social networks. **Consuming eWOM** before the trip additionally **influences if** the **experiences** is **shared** in the form of stories on social networks in the "**during-the-trip**" and "**after-the-trip**" phases as well, which in turn become "**social/external**" **touchpoints** in the customer journey of the next person traveling.

When social networks are used during the journey, customer stories on the **social networks support the choice of activities** during the journey.

The **influence** of Digital Storytelling on the customer journey for vacation trips by the Austrian Generation Y is thus **present at every stage**, but especially before the trip.



Future research

With the objective of presenting and analyzing the entire customer journey, it was not possible within the scope of this work to examine every possible touchpoint in every phase, as these also vary depending on the individual. In addition, both customer stories and organizational stories and their influence were examined, which is why the topic of the eWOM, for example, could certainly be dealt with in greater depth here.

In 2022, the Covid 19 pandemic was also a hot topic that was not considered in this thesis. In further research, this should be done and the **effect of storytelling on feelings of safety** could be **explored explicitly**.

In addition, this work provides a **basis for further research** by studying only one generation in one country for the time being. Accordingly, conclusions about other countries or generations are not possible or at best possible with limitations. Therefore, a **comparison of the influence** between **different generations** or a comparison according to **geographical differences**, e.g. by comparing the Austrian or European Generation Y with the one from the USA or an Asian country, would be an interesting continuation of the topic.

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