

Abstract

As a result of social networks, the tourists' customer journey for vacation trips are increasingly complex and tourists are confronted with more information every day. To still address people emotionally and stand out from the crowd of competitors and mass of information, companies are using digital storytelling as a communication tool. 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), which shapes the brand's message. 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. A large user group of social networks that is also very eager to travel and therefore important to address is the Generation Y, which is why this paper examines the following: *What influence does digital storytelling via social networks have on the customer journey for vacation trips of the Austrian Generation Y in 2022?*

The conceptual framework, which was developed by literature research, covers an analysis of the customer journey for vacation trips and digital storytelling via social networks. The customer journey of vacation travel is first presented based on its individual phases and the digital touchpoints via social networks and factors influencing them, followed by the introduction of digital storytelling by examining the differences of storytelling itself and digital storytelling on social media and the role of the UGC. Based on the conceptual framework 10 hypotheses were formed to operationalize the research question. To test these hypotheses empirically a CAWI was conducted on a quota sample of 386 Austrian Generation Y individuals. For the analysis frequency-tables, significance tests and correlation coefficients were used.

The literary and empirical analysis showed for the Austrian Generation Y that digital storytelling influences the customer journey for vacation trips primarily in the "pre-trip" phase, which then has an impact on the further phases. If digital storytelling about vacation travel or its components is consumed on social networks before the travel decision process, engagement in information search is increased, resulting in more touchpoints along the customer journey. Communication of marketing content with digital storytelling on social networks causes information to be perceived with less skepticism, it triggers positive associations for the featured product or brand and increases purchase/booking intentions among Austrian Millennials. The consumption of eWOM about vacation trips before the trip additionally shapes

expectations about one's own vacation trip and has the effect that eWOM is more likely to be generated on social networks both during and after the trip.

While these findings contribute to understanding the influence of digital storytelling on the customer journey, further research should focus separately on how the different kind of stories in digital storytelling are influencing the customer journey. This paper also levels the path for further investigation on how the influence of digital storytelling on the customer journey for vacation trips varies for different generations or geographical origins of the tourists.