

ABSTRACT: TRAVEL TALK – eWOM ACROSS MULTIPLE CULTURES

Tim Foster¹, Luleå University of Technology, Sweden, tim.foster@ltu.se
Maria Ek Styvén¹, Luleå University of Technology, Sweden, maria.styven@ltu.se
Åsa Wallström¹, Luleå University of Technology, Sweden, asa.wallstrom@ltu.se
Anne Engström¹, Luleå University of Technology, Sweden, anne.engstrom@ltu.se

Word-of-Mouth communication (WOM) is considered the most important, informal means of communication between consumers (Derbaix & Vanhamme, 2003). An increasingly important extension of the traditional face-to-face WOM used by consumers is the electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM), especially with regards to how eWOM is used within today's online social media outlets (Weisfeld-Spolter, Sussan & Gould, 2014). Within the travel and tourism industry, eWOM has become vitally important, as consumers tend to trust information from consumer-generated (social) media more than information from service providers (Ip, Lee & Law, 2012). This is particularly true for the younger generation of internet users – the "e-generation", who are "digital natives" and who have used digital technologies since they were kids. The aim of this study is to *provide a better understanding on how today's e-generation is using eWOM as tourists/travelers, from a multi-cultural perspective*. In order to reach this aim, the following research questions are stated: RQ1: How are e-generation consumers using eWOM when *planning* a trip?; RQ2: How are e-generation consumers using eWOM *during and after* a trip?

First, we conducted an exploratory study comprising four focus groups of 18 Swedish youths and young adults, aged 14-27. Following this, an online survey was developed and distributed to web panels of consumers between 16 and 30 years in Sweden, UK and India. In total, 642 responses were received.

Results show that eWOM is used extensively by e-generation travelers in all three countries studied. However, while the European e-generation have a lot in common, their counterparts in India have some rather distinct habits when it comes to seeking information before they take their trip, as well as sharing information during and after the trip. The data indicate that, while e-generation consumers might have a lot in common across national boundaries, there might be a "West" vs. "East" perspective that offers some differences among this generation. This to some extent contrasts to the widely spread notion that consumers within this generation are very similar across the globe. This "West vs. East" perspective provides some new insights for practitioners as well as future research directions. For tourism companies seeking to attract visitors from the huge Indian market, more knowledge on how young Indian consumers use eWOM in connection to their trips is valuable. Future research should focus on similar studies and continue with adding national as well as cross-cultural perspectives, with attention on the differences that the e-Generation could have in the "West" vs. the "East."

References available upon request

¹ Research project funded by the R&D Fund of the Swedish Tourism & Hospitality Industry (BFUF)