

Compare uses of electronic media among urban nature-based tourists

Andrew Oftedal, M.S., Arielle Courtney, Graduate Research Assistant, & Ingrid Schneider, Ph.D.



Background & Objectives

Effective visitor communication is essential to market, plan, & manage tourism & outdoor recreation. Authors concur E-travel is a major trend for trip research & online booking (Smith, 2012; Pew Research, 2012). To better understand traveler use of internet, social media, & technological devices, this project assessed visitor use & differences in use between nature- and non-nature based tourists in the Twin Cities Metropolitan Area, Minnesota.

Objectives

- Compare socio-demographic characteristics of nature-based (NB) & non-nature based tourists
- Identify use of electronic media among nature-based tourists
- Compare electronic media & technology use between nature-based & non-nature based tourists

Methodology

On-site questionnaires

- Administered to a convenience sample of Twin Cities (TC) Metropolitan Area visitors summer 2012
- 13 communities across the 7 county TC Metro

Selecting nature-based tourists

- Visitors who stayed 1-30 nights or who were on a day trip 50+ miles from primary residence
- Participated in outdoor recreation during their trip

Analysis

- Descriptive & Chi-square (χ^2) statistics

Findings: Nature-based tourists & media/device use

Socio-demographic comparisons

- Younger & more frequently male than non-NB tourists (average 43 vs. 45 yrs.; 59% vs. 51%, $p < .01$)
- Similar income: Most frequently \$50,000-99,999 (41.2%), \$100,000+ (38.6%)

Trip planning & information sharing among NB-tourists

- Main planning resources: friends/family (67%), area or travel website (41%) (Fig. 1 to the right)
- Main info sharing: websites (48%), Facebook (36%), smartphone (35%), & text message (23%) (Fig. 2,3 below)

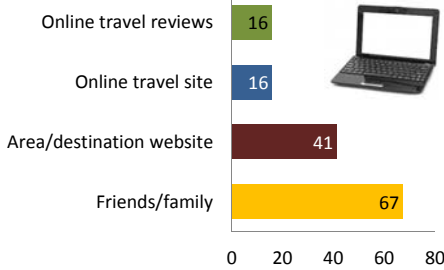


Figure 1. Primary sources of information nature-based tourists used to plan trips (%; n=545)

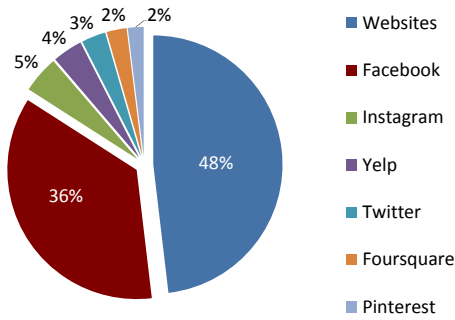


Figure 2. Internet sources nature-based tourists used to share or access information about travel during trip (n=551)

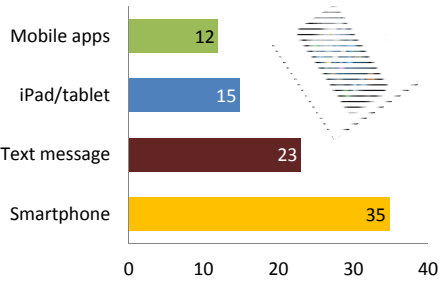


Figure 3. Electronic devices & methods used to share or access information about travel during trip (%; n=551)

Findings: Comparison of nature & non-nature based tourists media/device use

Nature-based tourists

- Information sources: 1 of 10 differs in use to plan trip: > Trip Advisor reviews among NB tourists
- 5 of 12 > use e-devices & apps to share trip info (Fig. 4)

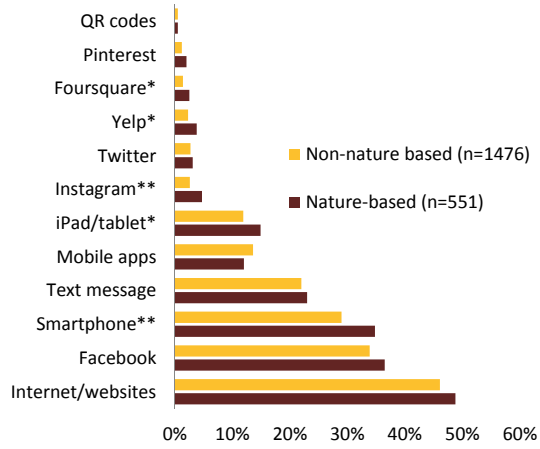


Figure 4. Differences in use of electronic media & devices to share/obtain information during trip between NB & non-NB tourists (* $p < .10$, ** $p < .05$, *** $p < .01$)

Non-nature based tourists

- Significantly less use of e-media to plan trips & share/obtain info (Fig. 4 to the left)
- Fewer changed plans due to social media than NB tourists (Fig. 5 below)

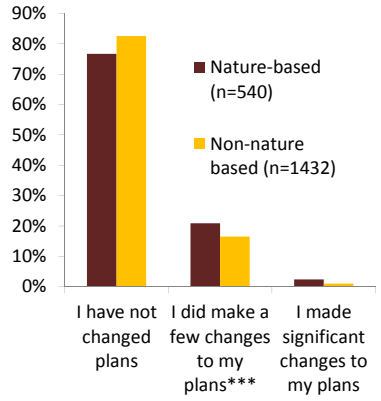


Figure 5. Percent of respondents who changed trip plans due to social media (* $p < .10$, ** $p < .05$, *** $p < .01$)

Implications & Opportunities

- Balance marketing across channels, with attention to e-placement
- Maintain accurate & timely data on websites & other online sources
- Monitor & respond to online reviews
- Expand information where it does not exist on the web
- Engage markets with opportunities to share pictures, experiences, or information via mobile devices in a variety of spaces with attention to Trip Advisor for nature-based tourists
- Format websites & other online resources for mobile & tablet design
- Continue to monitor use & changes in use of social media electronic devices

Future research

- Replicate project in a rural tourism setting to identify possible differences in social media & e-use
- Explore what content was shared & why
- Monitor multi-device use & patterns of use for booking, reservations



Acknowledgements

Thanks to the Metro Tourism Association for project support, data collectors, the University of Minnesota Center for Small Towns for data entry, Ryan Pesch for producing visitor maps, & the sites that allowed data collection. Photos courtesy of Anoka County Parks and Minneapolis Park & Recreation Board.