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Social Media Use and Best Practices by Convention and Visitors Bureaus

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SOCIAL MEDIA USE AND BEST PRACTICES
BY CONVENTION AND VISITORS BUREAUS

By

Carlie D. Allen, Bachelor of Science

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of

Stephen F. Austin State University

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements

For the Degree of

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December 2019

SOCIAL MEDIA USE AND BEST PRACTICES BY
CONVENTION AND VISITORS BUREAUS

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ABSTRACT

This study took an in-depth look at the social media utilization and best practices of Convention and Visitors Bureaus (CVBs) in selected mid-size Texas cities. Although there has been much social media research related to the tourism industry, little has been focused on local CVBs. Semi-structured interviews were administered with the marketing and/or social media directors at ten participating CVBs. Content analysis was performed on the Facebook and Instagram posts published by the participating CVBs during the time period of April 15 to May 15, 2018.

Various statistical analysis procedures were run on the resulting content analysis data, and many patterns and relationships were found, many of which correlated to subthemes found in interviews. When various social media tactics were analyzed in relation to levels of engagement, including the number of likes, comments, or shares on posts, it was found that some tactics lead to higher or lower engagement levels.

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my incredible parents, Doug and Charlotte Allen. None of this would be possible without your constant love, support and guidance.

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I would like to first thank my wonderful family and close friends who have supported me through this journey. I cannot thank my parents enough for the support and love they have given me throughout my entire life and academic career. I would also like to thank my grandparents who have always been incredibly helpful and supportive. For each of them, as well as many other family members and friends, I am eternally grateful.

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I would finally like to thank the Lord for my life and the opportunities I have been given, especially the opportunity to complete this work and degree. Jeremiah 29:11 says, “‘For I know the plans I have for you,’ declared the Lord, ‘plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.’” This verse perfectly sums up this accomplishment and journey for me.

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CHAPTER I

Introduction

Tourism has long been considered one of the largest and most influential industries worldwide. Since the sixteenth century aristocrats' Grand Tours of Europe, believed by many to be the beginnings of modern tourism (Zuelow, 2015), people have been entranced with the idea of traveling to new and exciting places.

The tourism industry has moved through countless phases and trends since those early days, and the most recent technological trends are truly changing the face of the industry. For example, the emergence of Web 2.0, the more interactive version of the traditional Internet, has led to the creation and widespread use of social networking sites in all industries. Social networking sites, or social media, are used by consumers to share experiences in many different forms. These sites can be used for strictly social purposes, for purposes of review products and experiences, for professional networking purposes, and for so much more. Social media sites, which originally were strictly used by individuals, are now seen as vital marketing tools for businesses in countless industries.

Social media marketing has the ability to provide less expensive alternatives to traditional forms of media. Large audiences can be reached through the use of social media, and research has shown that many consumers are now using social media more

than traditional media (Edelman, 2007; Roshnee Ramsaran-Fowdar & Fowdar, 2013). The travel and tourism industry is no exception to this trend. The use of social media in the travel marketing and trip planning process has grown at an unprecedented rate in recent years (Morosan, 2015). Consumers are using social media to rate and review travel experiences and destinations, and destination marketers are using these same sites to promote their destinations and experiences.

A destination at the most basic level is essentially any place to which travelers seek to visit. Because of the competitive nature of this industry, many destinations have established destination marketing organizations (DMOs) which exist primarily to attract tourists to visit their destination through various promotional efforts (Litvin & Mouri, 2009; Morosan, 2015). DMOs are present in many different forms, usually defined by the size and scope of the destinations which they promote.

National tourism organizations (NTOs) promote entire countries to foreign tourists and can be defined as “distinct government, semi-government, or private sector bodies largely or almost wholly responsible for the promotion of inbound tourism” (Zahra & Ryan, 2005, p. 7). Many Americans are likely to be familiar with advertising by state tourism organizations (STOs) which advertise to other states across the United States. STOs promote their states through widespread campaigns in the nation with campaigns such as *Pure Michigan* and *Travel Oregon*.

Regional tourism organizations (RTOs) generally represent a region containing several destinations. These destinations can be cities, states, or counties. The Texas

Forest Trail Region is an RTO which represents 35 counties in East Texas. Deep South USA, which represents Alabama, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, and Tennessee as a tourism region, is another example of an RTO. The most locally-based type of DMO is the Convention and Visitors Bureau (CVB). A CVB generally represents a single city or county as a destination to promote economic growth through tourism. (Whisenat, 2012).

With \$80.3 billion in direct travel-related income in 2018, Texas is among the top states visited by tourists (Perryman, 2019). Because of the huge role this industry plays in the economy of the state, DMOs have become widespread and a necessary economic development generator for many communities. Aside from having an active STO, many Texas cities and counties have put focus and resources into their CVBs in efforts to promote their destination to tourists, both in the state and beyond. The Texas Association of Convention and Visitors Bureaus (TACVB) is a membership-based organization that counts many Texas CVBs as members. The goal of TACVB is to support their member organizations through education, focus, and leadership (Texas Association of Convention and Visitor Bureaus, 2015).

The focus of this study is Texas convention and visitors bureaus. It is important to note that CVBs are structured differently; some are part of municipal government entities, while others are completely independent or partnered with chambers of commerce. The managing bodies of each CVB can create distinct differences in each organization's budget and functions. Some CVBs have large marketing budgets, while others focus much of their efforts on convention sales or event development.

Despite the vast differences between CVBs in the state, each one's primary goal remains the same: to promote their destinations (generally a town, city, or county) to potential outside tourists. The Texas Hotel and Lodging Association defines tourism as "guiding or managing individuals who are traveling to a different, city, county, state, or country" (What Cities Need to Know to Administer Municipal Hotel Occupancy Taxes, 2011). Another similarity between most CVBs is their reliance on Hotel Occupancy Tax (HOT) funds. HOT funds refer to the tax revenue made from a designated tax on hotel, motel, and short-term rental property stays within communities (*What Cities Need to Know to Administer Municipal Hotel Occupancy Taxes*, 2011).

Social media has become a pivotal piece of the branding and marketing efforts of destinations, and DMOs must utilize social media correctly in order to reach the widest audience possible (Leung, Law, van Hoof, & Buhalis, 2013). Because social media is one of the most influential trends in destination marketing in recent years (Xiang & Gretzel, 2010), this study will look at how CVBs are using social media in their marketing efforts and will focus on Facebook and Instagram social media outlets.

Significance

In recent years, the rapid rise of social media marketing has greatly affected the way destinations are marketed. While much research has been done on social media utilization by national destination marketing organizations, very little has been examined at the regional and local organization level (Pabel & Prideaux, 2016). Because of this, little is known about general use and best practices by these organizations. The purpose

of this study is to examine how local CVBs are utilizing social media in the marketing of their destinations.

This study demonstrates industry significance because of the large influence social media is currently having on destination marketing. Previous researchers have reported that social media marketing can be an effective tool for DMOs to save money in their limited budgets while reaching large numbers of potential visitors (Hoffman & Fodor, 2010; Morosan, 2015). Social media marketing can also lead to improved branding due to higher brand participation by consumers (Schmitt, 2012) and provide more efficient avenues for customer input (Hoffman & Fodor, 2010; Morosan, 2015). Because of each of these positive benefits, the findings of this study could potentially give insight into effective as well as ineffective ways that CVBs are utilizing social media marketing.

Overview of Study

This is an exploratory study that seeks to help fill the gap in literature regarding the ways in which social media is used as a marketing tool by local DMOs. Morosan (2015, p. 56) pointed out that a major area missing from academic literature “is an extensive body of research examining the manner in which social media are used as marketing tools by organizations.” This study utilizes both quantitative and qualitative research methods in an attempt to explain what CVBs are doing in relation to social media marketing, as well as how and why they are doing it. Semi-structured interviews with CVB marketing personnel were conducted taking a close look at the social media

marketing strategies being used by organizations and the importance the organization places on these strategies. Content analysis was performed on the Facebook and Instagram pages managed by their respective CVBs in order to take a more in-depth look at the branding, types of posts, interaction, and engagement being presented.

Limitations and Assumptions

This study is conducted under the assumption that increased social media presence and engagement translate to increased awareness of a destination. The much broader assumption present is that an increased level of awareness is likely to lead to an increased number of visitors to a destination over time. A major limitation of this study is that the scope and time constraints do not allow for more research into possible evidence regarding actual numbers of visitors in relation to social media presence. Another limitation of this study is size and geographical location of the CVBs involved. While the CVBs represented in the study are located in various parts of the state of Texas, they do not necessarily represent the same findings that could be present for other states in the USA or even other countries. The size range of the CVBs involved is another limitation. All CVBs selected operate on annual budgets between \$200,000 and \$999,999. This range was selected to keep the samples similar in terms of possible budgets dedicated to social media marketing. However, there is a large amount of variability even in this limited range between city size, available staff, and marketing budgets of each organization. It is also important to note much larger or smaller DMOs could be employing very different tactics simply because of the sizes of their budgets.

CHAPTER II

Literature Review

Social Media Growth and Important Sites

In recent years, it has become apparent that social media marketing is an important tool in many industries. Some research suggests that consumers are spending more time viewing online marketing than any type of traditional marketing channels (Edelman, 2007; Ramsaran-Fowdar & Fowdar, 2013). For this reason, many organizations are beginning to focus much of their marketing efforts on social media, oftentimes employing social media managers or even entire social media departments (Ramsaran-Fowdar & Fowdar, 2013). Social media marketing has many benefits such as lowered marketing costs, increased ability to communicate with customers and provide customized advertising, and increased opportunities to receive consumer input (Ramsaran-Fowdar & Fowdar, 2013; Hoffman & Fodor, 2010; Morosan, 2015).

With 1.4 billion active users daily and 2.13 billion active users monthly (“Company Info,” 2018), Facebook is considered the most visited social media site (Ramsaran-Fowdar & Fowdar, 2013). Facebook utilizes words, videos, pictures, website links, blog links, and other types of posts to reach a page’s *followers* or an individual’s *friends*. Facebook can be an outlet for the advertising of an organization, but it also serves as a platform for interaction with consumers on a more personal level. When followers comment or post about an organization, the organization has a chance to

build relationships directly with consumers (Haigh, Brubaker, & Whiteside, 2013).

Figure 1 shows an example of a Facebook post which contains a photo, tags, hashtags, comments, likes/reactions, and shares (see Appendix D. Definition of Terms).



Figure 1. Example Facebook Post from Stephen F. Austin State University (2019)

Instagram is a social networking site based on the sharing of photos and videos. Initially developed as a site for sharing photography online instantly, Instagram has now become an important marketing and promotion tool for many organizations that wish to share visual representations of their products and services (Fatanti & Suyadnya, 2015). In addition to Facebook and Instagram, Twitter, LinkedIn, Youtube, Google+, and Pinterest were ranked among the top-used social networking sites in 2016 (Stelzner, 2016). Figure

2 shows an example of an Instagram post which contains a photo, a tag, hashtags, likes, and comments.



Figure 2. Example Instagram Post from Stephen F. Austin State University (2019)

Facebook and Instagram provide various opportunities for both organic and paid marketing for organizations. Organic growth on social media refers to marketing which is achieved without the use of paid promotions (Young, Tate, Rossman, & Hansen, 2014). Paid promotions can come in the form of ads, which can be highly targeted to certain

demographics and regions of used and are denoted with the word “Sponsored” on users’ newsfeed. The term News Feed refers to the ads, statuses, photos, and other posts that appear on the Facebook home page of users (Young et al., 2014). Boosted posts are another form of paid advertisement used by organizations on Facebook and Instagram in which an existing post is elevated in followers’ newsfeeds “to increase visibility and engagement” (Young et al., 2014, p. 428).

Social Media in Tourism

According to the World Travel and Tourism Council’s annual economic impact report, the tourism industry generated about \$8.8 trillion in 2018 and supported 318 million jobs worldwide (World Travel and Tourism Council, 2019). Because of the huge impact the tourism industry has made on almost every country in the world, a topic as influential to the field as social media must not be ignored. Social media is undoubtedly having an immeasurable effect on the tourism industry. From hotels to DMOs to travelers themselves, every aspect of the industry has been transformed by the overwhelming growth in the use of social media. According to Xiang and Gretzel (2010), social media is one of two “mega trends” that has the ability to affect tourism greatly, along with the widespread use of search engines. There are several sectors of social media use that affect the industry; the most influential of these is the use of social media during the travel planning process. Because of the huge uptick in the number of tourists using social media to plan trips, DMOs must look at social media as an integral part of their marketing strategies in order to reach a wider audience (Leung et al., 2013).

The two sources of social media content in terms of tourism are users (travelers) and marketers (DMOs). Organic or user-generated content (UGC) contributes greatly to electronic word of mouth (eWOM) in the tourism industry. It can also have a great influence on the way a destination's brand is portrayed to other visitors (Lim, Chung, & Weaver, 2012). Marketer-generated content (MGC) is produced by DMOs to promote their destinations. MGC is often strategic in nature and used to promote the destination brand. While these two forms of content are very different, they can often be used together in effective social media strategies by DMOs (Lim et al., 2012; Tham, Croy, & Mair, 2013).

Social Media Used by Tourists

Fatani and Suyadnya (2015) state that because of the Internet and social networks it is now possible for travelers to communicate with people around the world about their tourism experiences. Word of Mouth (WOM) has long been considered a highly influential factor in the travel decision making process (Burgess, Cox, & Buultjens, 2009). While WOM is important in many industries that involve purchasing decisions, it is considered especially vital in the field of tourism since making a travel decision is often done with no prior experience with the destination (Burgess et al., 2009). When planning a trip, travelers know that they will be potentially investing a large amount of money and time in their vacations. For this reason, many tourists prefer to “collect and review various forms of travel information early in the travel decision-making process in order to minimize the risk of making wrong decisions” (Jeng & Fesenmaier, 2002; Leung

et al., 2013, p. 8). With the rise of social media use has come the emergence of UGC on various platforms. UGC is the major component associated with the new sector of WOM, electronic word of mouth (eWOM). Although some travelers perceive eWOM as less trustworthy than traditional WOM (Leung et al., 2013), other research suggests that WOM and eWOM carry the same high levels of influence (Cheung, Lee, & Rabjohn, 1108; Hennig-Thurau, Walsh, & Walsh, 2003; Lee & Youn, 2009; Litvin, Goldsmith, & Pan, 2008; Tham et al., 2013). Burgess et al. (2009) suggest the experiences described in reviews and other UGC are still real and not manufactured for advertising purposes, and, as such, they are still considered credible and reliable. One major issue with both WOM and eWOM is that, in many cases, a consumer is more likely to share an extremely satisfying or unsatisfying experience than a satisfactory, average, or slightly less than average experience (Burgess et al., 2009).

Social Media Used by DMOs

Before the recent surge of social media and other Internet sources providing travel-related information, the major role of a DMO was to provide travelers with information that could potentially convince them to visit a particular destination (Morosan, 2015). However, with the major rise in these types of marketing channels, DMOs are finding themselves faced with the challenge of utilizing social and online resources in the best ways possible to market themselves to consumers who use these sources for primary travel information. Pabel and Prideaux (2015, p. 336) explain that “for DMOs, social media provides another avenue for increasing awareness about

specific destinations as well as providing opportunities to engage with potential tourists through features that encourage co-creation.” Social media marketing should not be thought of as an afterthought or addition to traditional marketing strategies (Pabel & Prideaux, 2016; Trusov, Bucklin, & Pauwels, 2009). Oliveira and Panyik (2015) state that social media sites are ideal platforms for spreading the messages and stories of destination brands.

DMOs represent a broad range of stakeholders in various sectors of their respective communities, such as restaurants, hotels and attractions. This creates an added layer of responsibility to advertise their destination effectively. DMOs must use their marketing strategies to market themselves and also their various stakeholders (Morosan, 2015).

Strategies used by DMOs. Because of the incredibly large amount of UGC available on the web, DMOs must be strategic in the ways they use social media to market their destinations. DMOs must use social media strategically to “dynamically engage with customers” (Pabel & Prideaux, 2015) and gain the attention of potential travelers (Xiang & Gretzel, 2010). Interacting with social media users is an excellent strategy for positively influencing eWOM for a destination (Tham et al., 2013).

According to Kiralova and Pavlicecka (2015, p. 366), social media marketing can “help destinations to remain competitive if they present interesting content, use creativity and support and motivate interactive content.”

Engagement. One important tactic that can be utilized by DMOs is engagement with consumers. Hudson & Thal (2013) stated that engaging with consumers on social media can be a great source of reinforcement of brand strength. According to Zouganeli, Trihas, and Antonaki (2011), the evolution of consumer interaction should be viewed as one of the most important innovations of the new age of social media marketing. Engagement is not only important in terms of answering consumers' questions, but engagement levels are also a key factor in the placement of posts in followers' newsfeeds. According to Young et al. (2014, p. 427), if a post has higher engagement levels, it is "more likely to appear in the newsfeeds of friends, resulting in further engagement and the increased potential for new followers."

Some research has shown that many DMOs are not properly utilizing engagement because they may not realize its important role in social media marketing (Zouganeli et al., 2011). Oliveira and Panyik (2015, p. 70) state that because travelers now have such a tremendous impact on the destination brand through UGC, "it is recommended that the tourism sector takes a much more active role in engaging with them." Similarly, research has also shown that interacting with consumers will positively impact the building of destination brands, because awareness of travelers' wants and needs will be more apparent, and the brand will have the opportunity to receive more visibility (Oliveira & Panyik, 2015). Some social media tactics can be used to increase engagement levels. Two examples of these are contests and calls-to-action (CTAs). Contests are used on various social media sites and generally involve giving something away in order to increase

promotion organically and obtain new followers (Sachs, 2017). CTAs urge users to perform a certain task, including signing up for a newsletter, reading a blog post for more information, and many other similar tasks. This tactic could be used to increase website traffic, drive event ticket sales, or encourage interaction from followers (Marinigh, 2015).

Utilization of User Generated Content. Another potentially important tactic for DMOs is the utilization of UGC. Because of the widespread creation of UGC, “DMOs are no longer the major controllers over their brands and messages, and consumers are also creators and distributors of social media content” (Lim et al., 2012, p. 198). In some cases, it has been shown that UGC is actually perceived as a source of more reliable information than the content posted by DMOs (Fotis, Buhalis, & Rossides, 2012; Munar, 2012; Yoo & Gretzel, 2008). Many travelers are less likely to trust social media advertising by DMOs that focuses on the advantages of visiting a particular destination (Királ'ová & Pavlíčka, 2015). In addition, many consumers believe that WOM is more trustworthy and influential to them since, in most cases, recommenders do not possess any commercial or financial self-interest (Burgess et al., 2009). Zouganeli et al. (2011) state that UGC is considered to be an important measure of success of engagement with social media communities.

UGC can come in many different forms, including reviews through travel sites such as Travelzoo and Travelocity, comments and reviews through Facebook, comments on various blogs, and social media and blog posts by social media influencers. Social media influencers are “a new type of independent thirdparty endorser who shape

audience attitudes through blogs, tweets, and the use of other social media” (Freberg, Graham, McGaughey, & Freberg, 2011, p. 90).

In some cases, the messages and branding behind UGC can differ greatly from that distributed by DMOs (Lim et al., 2012). In a study conducted by Lim et al. (2012), this type of difference was demonstrated; it compared a sample of user-generated videos to a sample of destination marketer-generated videos, portraying the same destination on the same social networking site. The study found that UGC often attracts a much higher number of people than marketer-generated content (Lim et al., 2012). The study also demonstrated the fact that identifying social media influencers for their destination and encouraging them to post content that goes along with their destination brand could potentially be highly influential (Lim et al., 2012). Some posts and reviews by social media influencers can be perceived as having negative consequences on a brand (Gorry & Westbrook, 2009), making it even more important to understand the motives and reach of individual influencers (Freberg et al., 2011)

CHAPTER III

Methodology

This study sought to explore the social media strategies and tactics being used by local destination marketers in the promotion of their communities to outside visitors. It also sought to understand the reasoning behind these strategies being used. According to IPK International (2015), about 40% of travelers were influenced by social media sites in their destination selection for vacations, and about 50% of travelers posted about their experience either during or after their trips. The incredibly high number of people using social media in their travel planning process, as well as during their actual trips, show the significance of this study and its findings.

Research Design

This exploratory study was largely modeled after a study conducted on national DMOs by Hays, Page, & Buhalis (2013). This study utilized a mixed methods approach to examine multiple facets of social media use in destination marketing. The study sought to “explore the nature and degree of usage of social media among tourism destinations” (Hays et al., 2013, p. 214) through semi-structured interviews with marketing professionals at CVBs.

This study and the qualitative analysis sought to understand the intentions and strategies used by local CVBs. The quantitative research method was utilized to examine similarities and differences between social media use and tactics in an effort to begin to

understand overall best practices. A main objective of the content analysis was to examine engagement levels of different posts on both Facebook and Instagram. For the purposes of this study, engagement is measured by number of likes and comments on Instagram and number of likes, comments, and shares on Facebook. It is important to note that Facebook likes include all Facebook “reactions”. This new feature allows users to provide a reaction to a post other than a simple like, including love, excitement, etc. They are all counted under the number of likes.

Research Objectives

1. Investigate how Convention and Visitors Bureaus in mid-size Texas cities utilize social media to market their destinations.
2. Determine if certain social media tactics are more widely used by these organizations.
3. Determine if certain social media tactics have higher perceived benefits (i.e. likes, followers, comments, interaction).
4. Investigate if certain social media tactics lead to higher levels of engagement.

Research Hypotheses

1. Posts containing User Generated Content have higher rates of engagement than those with Marketer Generated Content.
2. Posts containing contests and giveaways have higher rates of engagement than other types of posts.

3. Posts containing calls to action have higher rates of engagement than other types of posts.

Setting and Sampling

Marketing directors or social media directors from ten selected CVBs were interviewed, and social media content from their respective pages was analyzed. The participants are all responsible for the social media marketing operations for CVBs in mid-size cities in Texas who are members of the Texas Association of Convention and Visitors Bureaus (TACVB). An initial invitation email was sent to all TACVB members whose budget is within the range of \$200,000 to \$999,999 per year. This range was set to ensure that only organizations with relatively similar potential social media budgets were analyzed.

Of the sixty-seven members invited, ten were willing and able to participate in the interviews. The fact that the participating CVBs are from various geographic regions of Texas provides the ability to show whether or not social media strategies vary by region. Figure 3 shows the respondents represented on a Texas map. The number ten was selected for interviews as it was a manageable number for the time constraints of the study while still providing the opportunity to have a wide enough range of different locations, structures, and practices of CVBs.

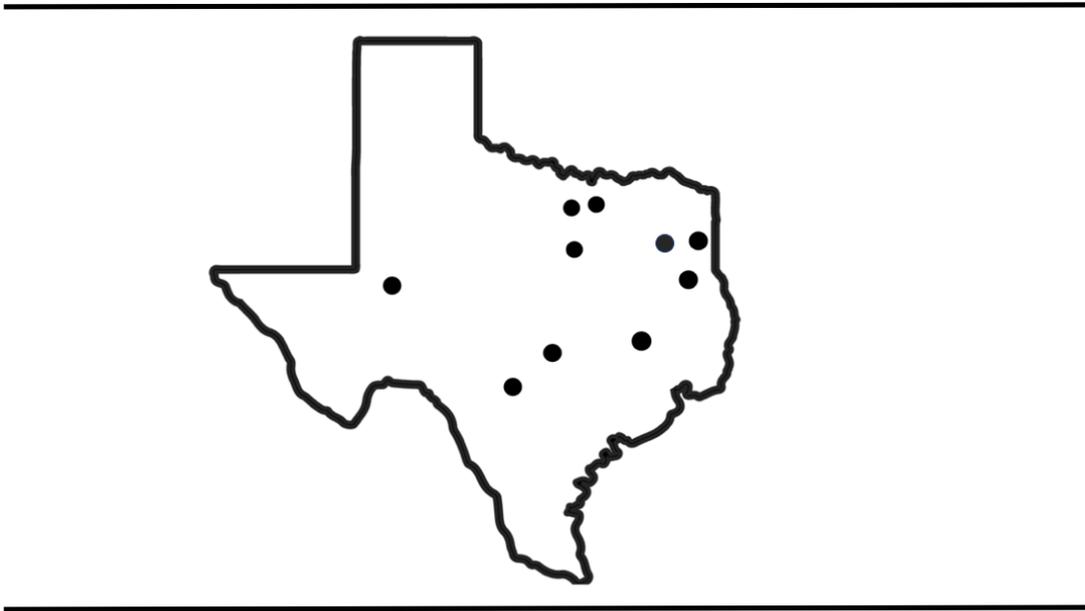


Figure 3. Interview Respondent Locations

Research Approach and Data Collection

This study utilized a mixed methods research approach in order not only to examine what CVBs are doing in terms of social media marketing, but also how and why they are utilizing those practices. Semi-structured interviews examined the methods, tactics, and reasoning behind the social media marketing being utilized at each CVB. Then the content analysis examined the actual posts on both social media sites, as well as the interaction levels on each post. This combination of methods is intended to provide the reasoning associated with qualitative research as well as the scientific, measurable outcomes associated with quantitative research (Oliveira & Panyik, 2015).

Each respondent was asked a series of questions related to their social media use (Table 1). These questions were adapted from those asked in the Hays et al. (2013) study. Some of their original questions were used, while some others were altered and added both to account for changes in trends over the last six years and to gain a more specific understanding of smaller DMOs' tactics for social media marketing. In order to ask open ended questions, a qualitative form of analysis was used. Because all organizations are implementing their social media efforts in very different ways, an open-ended interview was the best method of gathering data specific to each organization. It was found by Hays et al. (2013, p. 217) that this type of analysis "proved particularly useful in understanding discrepancies between what the tourism-marketing professionals *believe* is happening and what is *actually* taking place." The semi-structured interviews were conducted via telephone and recorded. The interviews took place between April and October of 2018. They were then be transcribed and analyzed by the researcher. Themes emerged through qualitative analysis of the interview answers, and data was analyzed through open-coding procedures. Institutional Research Board Approval was received for this protocol and can be seen in Appendix A, while Appendix B shows the informed consent form sent to participants.

Table 1. Semi-structured interview questions

-
1. How is your CVB structured (for example, a city department, independent entity, chamber of commerce)?
 2. What social media tools are employed (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, a blog, etc.)?
 3. When did the _____ CVB begin utilizing Facebook? Instagram?
 4. How many people are responsible for maintaining a social media presence, developing strategies/campaigns, etc.?
 5. What is the total budget dedicated toward social media? What percentage of the total marketing budget is this? How much is spent on, for example, TV or magazines (and how does that compare to what was spent in previous years)?
 6. Do you feel as if you stakeholders place importance on social media as a destination marketing tool? Why or why not?
 - 7a. How do social media and traditional media reinforce each other at the _____ CVB?
 - 7b. Which is valued more?
 8. What have been the biggest struggles related to incorporating social media into the _____ CVB's marketing strategy?
 9. How does the _____ CVB plan to develop social media in the future?
 10. How do you measure successful social media efforts?
 11. How do you measure return on investment related to social media?
 12. What makes marketing _____ as a destination different from other communities?
 13. To whom are most of the social media efforts directed (particular markets)?
 14. Are you using social media for particular markets (i.e. targeting posts)?
 15. What type of posts do you think are the most effective on Facebook? Instagram?
 16. Do you have any particular strategies to gain followers on Instagram, 'likes' on Facebook? (e.g. do you think it helps to have a contest, ask a question, request photos, something general, advertising an event, etc.)
 17. Do you use any comparison testing with similar social media accounts?
 18. How often and by what means do you view and track your social media analytics?
 19. How do you measure engagement on social media? For example, number of likes, post reach, shares, follows?
 20. Do you utilize co-created content by active participants such as those who write blogs, TripAdvisor ratings, comments on social media, etc.?
 - a. If yes, in what way are they utilized?
 - b. If no, would you appreciate the opportunity to use co-created content? (For example, sharing of travel blogs, good reviews, etc.)
 21. Do you have a program or standards in place to respond to visitor posts and comments?
 22. Do you have a program or standards in place to familiarize yourself and other marketing staff with best practices and uses for social media?
 23. Would you be willing to participate in a follow up interview, if needed?
 24. Would you be willing to share your Facebook and Instagram analytics?
-

While the interviews ask questions regarding more general social media use, the content analysis segment is more targeted at two specific social media channels: Facebook and Instagram. Facebook, a social networking site which allows users to share photos, videos, thoughts, and more, is arguably the most widely used social media channel in the world (Leung et al., 2013). This fact, combined with its algorithms that focus on business ad usage, make it an obvious choice for content analysis in this study.

In relation to tourism, Zouganeli et al. (2011) state that the size of a destination's online community can be defined by the number of followers it has on Facebook. Instagram, a social networking site that focuses on shared photos often with short, directed captions, was chosen as it is growing in use by both consumers and businesses, and it is a prime platform for use to DMOs because it is a visually-driven site. Instagram is an ideal way for DMOs to truly show users the unique and beautiful qualities their destinations have to offer (Fokkema & Svensson, 2016). Posts from the ten CVBs interviewed were examined and analyzed. All posts on Facebook and Instagram were analyzed for the time period of one month lasting from April 15th to May 15th, 2018. Each post made by selected CVBs was analyzed and hand-coded by the researcher. The resulting data was analyzed via SPSS using univariate and multivariate descriptive procedures, as well as multivariate means procedures. This time frame was chosen to provide opportunities to see posts from April, a generally average month for tourism, and from May, which not only marks both the beginning of summer vacation season, but also contains National Travel and Tourism Week from May 6th through May 12th (Shields, 2017).

It is important to note the reasons for the potential for a large degree of variability in the statistical results of this study. One reason for this would be the relative newness of the social media sites related to past research. Another reason would be the inability of the researcher to determine if the posts being analyzed were able to reach more followers because of paid boosting. These posts often result in a post receiving more follows, likes, and comments than an organic post would.

The categories used for content analysis were also adapted from the Hays et al. (2013) study, which utilized a quantitative content analysis method to examine the use of Facebook and Twitter by national DMOs. Some categories in this study have been altered and updated in order to incorporate Instagram instead of Twitter in the analysis. Other categories have been altered in accordance with changes and updates regarding Facebook. The categories are represented in Table 2. This method was chosen in order to “incorporate as much data and scope of social media activity as possible” (Hays et al., 2013, p. 214). For the purposes of this study, the categories in Table 2 denoted with an asterisk represent social media tactics that will be measured in accordance with engagement levels. Engagement is measured by number of likes, comments, and shares. It is important to note that shares are Facebook specific as they are not easily tracked on Instagram, but likes and comments are measured on both social media channels.

Ethical Considerations

Although this study presents minimal risk to participants, there are ethical considerations. Names of specific CVBs, as well as those of their marketing directors interviewed, were omitted from the study. This is the case so that no particular CVB is considered superior or inferior to another in terms of their social media practices. This study could be viewed by many in the field because it is likely that CVBs could benefit from reading about and implementing some of the strategies found in this study.

Table 2. Categories for Content Analysis

CVB Name
Social Media Outlet (Facebook or Instagram)
Are there any tags?*
How many people/organizations are tagged?*
Are there any hashtags?*
How many are used?*
Was a signature hashtag used?*
Was a hashtag for National Travel and Tourism Week used?*
Are there any comments?
How many comments?
Are there any likes?
How many likes?
Are there any shares?
How many shares?
Does the post ask a question?*
Does the post contain a call to action?*
Is the post part of a contest?*
Does the post contain any other content?*
Link to DMO website?*
Link to other website?*
Link to DMO blog?*
Link to other blog?*
Photo?*
Video?*
Is the post requesting feedback from travelers?*
Does this post contain user-generated content?*
Does the post request user-generated content?*
Is this post promotion related?*
Is it promoting an event?*
Is it promoting a specific destination or attraction?*
Is it promoting another website?*
Is it promoting the CVB's website?*
Is it promoting a restaurant?*
Is it promoting a hotel?*
Is it promoting an event or meeting space?*
Is it promoting another social media outlet of the DMO?*
Does the post provide information?*
Does the post provide factual information?*
Does the post provide an opinion or review?*
Is the post congratulatory?*
Is it congratulating the CVB itself? (for an award, honor, etc.)*
Is it congratulating others?*
Has the information in the post been posted previously during the time frame of content analysis?

Building Quality Into The Study

According to Creswell (2013, p. 243), qualitative research seeks to find a “deep structure of knowledge that comes from visiting personally with participants, spending extensive time in the field, and probing to obtain detailed meaning.” Because of the more elusive nature of this type of research, it is important to build quality and validation into qualitative studies. Validity in qualitative studies refers to the accuracy of the findings from the research, while reliability refers to the ability of different researchers to come to the same conclusions (Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Gibbs, 2008). This study employs a mixed methods approach, and it is the hope of the researcher that the quantitative piece will add a more grounded and scientific aspect to the study. However, as the qualitative research is the primary focus, it is still important to build reliability and validity into the study.

According to Golafshani (2003, p. 604), in the context of a qualitative study, “reliability and validity are conceptualized as trustworthiness, rigor and quality”. Triangulation with other sources and member checking with participants will be utilized, as well as an external auditor, to build validity in the study (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Triangulation involves compiling “evidence from different sources to shed light on a theme or perspective” (Creswell, 2013, p. 251). An external auditor will give an unrelated individual the chance to review the study to ensure the data is supportive of the findings and procedures to ensure validity. To provide reliability, transcripts were checked for mistakes, and a committee member cross-checked the codes (Creswell & Creswell,

2017). Reliability is vital in qualitative studies as it “refers to the stability of responses to multiple coders of data sets” (Creswell, 2013, p. 253) and shows the study could be duplicated.

CHAPTER IV

Results

Semi-structured interviews were conducted on the marketing personnel of ten CVBs within the budget range of \$200,000 to \$999,999 per year. The CVBs were all located in Texas, with three located in the North Texas region, four located in the East Texas Region, two located in the Central Texas Region, and one located in the West Texas Region. Only one of the participating CVBs had three full-time employees responsible for social media campaigns, three CVBs had two full-time staff for social efforts, and six CVBs had only one full-time staff for these duties. Of these CVBs, three are structured as members of Chambers of Commerce, six are City Government departments, and one is a County Government department. Table 3 shows the structure, number of full-time staff responsible for social media, and geographic region for each participating CVB. The mean number of social media staff was 1.5, and the median number of social media staff was 1. The modal structure of the participating CVBs was city government.

Many of the resulting themes from these interviews represent social media goals and strategies of the CVBs interviewed, many of which correspond with tactics measured by the content analysis. The content analysis was performed on both the Facebook and Instagram channels of the ten CVBs interviewed, and the quantitative results found correlate with the research hypotheses and objectives outlined in the methodology. The

themes found during coding of the semi-structured interviews also correspond with these research objectives, with one additional theme added. The themes outlined in the results of this study were *Utilization of Social Media, Widely Used Tactics, Tactics with Perceived Higher Benefits, Tactics with Higher Levels of Engagement, and Staff, Structure, and Stakeholders.*

Table 3. Participating CVBs' Basic Facts

CVB	Number of Staff	Structure	Region of Texas
1	3	Chamber of Commerce	North Texas
2	2	City Government	North Texas
3	1	City Government	East Texas
4	1	Chamber of Commerce	West Texas
5	1	City Government	East Texas
6	1	City Government	North Texas
7	2	City Government	Central Texas
8	1	City Government	East Texas
9	2	County Government	Central Texas
10	1	City Government	East Texas

Utilization of Social Media

Research objective one of this study states that the researcher will, “investigate how Convention and Visitors Bureaus in mid-size Texas cities utilize social media to market their destinations.” Through content analysis, it was found that all participating

CVBs utilized both Instagram and Facebook in the marketing of their destinations. Table 4 displays the number of Facebook and Instagram followers of each CVB, as well as the total number of posts during the study on each channel.

Table 4. Basic Social Media Channel Information of Participating CVBs

CVB	Facebook Followers	Facebook Posts in Study	Instagram Followers	Instagram Posts in Study
1	16,862	97	13,252	87
2	11,655	5	1,025	0
3	13,680	62	1,190	29
4	2,729	8	978	6
5	17,233	6	3,753	0
6	8,812	81	1,724	1
7	32,143	33	7,724	30
8	10,852	27	2,138	1
9	10,146	34	1,365	21
10	7,161	26	667	4
Total	131,273	379	33,816	179
Mean	13,127	37.9	3,382	17.9
Median	11,655	33	1,724	6
Minimum	2,729	5	667	0
Maximum	131,273	379	33,816	179
Standard Deviation	7558.3	30.4	3850.8	25.7

The number of Facebook and Instagram followers, as well as the number of posts on both Facebook and Instagram during the study, varied greatly between the participating CVBs. The minimum number of Facebook followers for CVBs in the study was 2,729, and the maximum number was 32,143. The minimum number of Instagram followers for CVBs in the study was 667, and the maximum number was 13,252. The least number of Facebook posts in the study by one CVB was five, and the most posts was 97. Two CVBs had no Instagram posts in the study, and the largest number of posts was 87. The average number of Facebook followers among the CVBs was 13,127, while the average number of Instagram followers was considerably less at 3,382. Participating CVBs had an average number of 37.9 Facebook posts and 17.9 Instagram posts.

Information on the days of the week that posts were published was collected during content analysis in order to determine if posting on particular days was more widely used by the CVBs. Figure 4 shows the total number of posts on each day of the week during the time of content analysis. Table 5 shows the results from the crosstabulation procedure performed on the number of posts per day per channel. It shows both the number of posts per day by channel and the percentage of posts per day by channel.

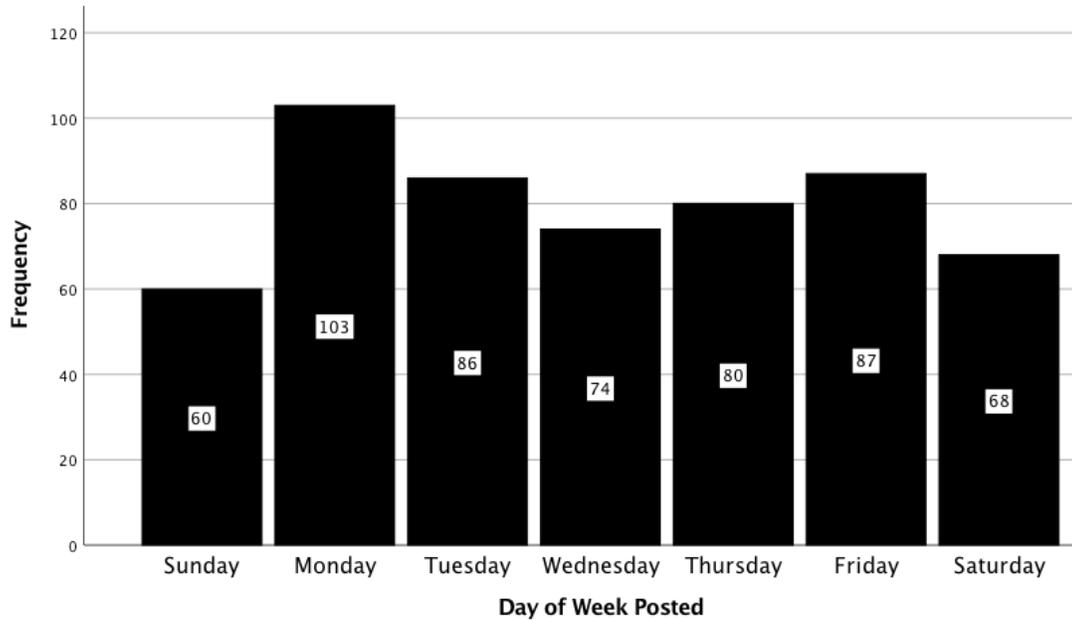


Figure 4. Total Posts per Day of Week During Content Analysis

Table 5. Posts per Channel per Day of Week During Content Analysis

	Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Total
Facebook	39 (10.29%)	70 (18.47%)	56 (14.78%)	54 (14.25%)	55 (14.51%)	59 (15.68%)	46 (12.14%)	379 (100%)
Instagram	21 (11.73%)	33 (18.44%)	30 (16.76%)	20 (11.17%)	25 (13.97%)	28 (15.64%)	22 (12.29%)	179 (100%)
Total	60 (10.75%)	103 (18.46%)	86 (15.41%)	74 (13.26%)	80 (14.34%)	87 (15.59%)	68 (12.19%)	558 (100%)

It can be determined by this procedure that overall, Monday is the modal day as it is the day during which the most posts are published, followed by Friday, Tuesday, Thursday, Wednesday, Saturday and Sunday, respectively. On both Facebook and Instagram, Monday had the highest number of posts (n=103). However, results vary from

there between the two channels. In descending order, the most Instagram posts were published on Monday, followed by Tuesday, Friday, Thursday, Saturday, Sunday, and Wednesday. On Facebook, the most posts were published on Monday, followed by Friday, Tuesday, Thursday, Wednesday, Saturday, and Sunday, respectively.

Dates during which posts were published were also analyzed to determine if any of the dates or particular weeks during content analysis were more widely utilized. Figure 5 shows the number of posts on each date during content analysis. The minimum number of posts per day during the study was 9 on April 22nd, and the maximum number of posts during the study was 28 on May 11th. The mean number of posts published each day of the study was 18.

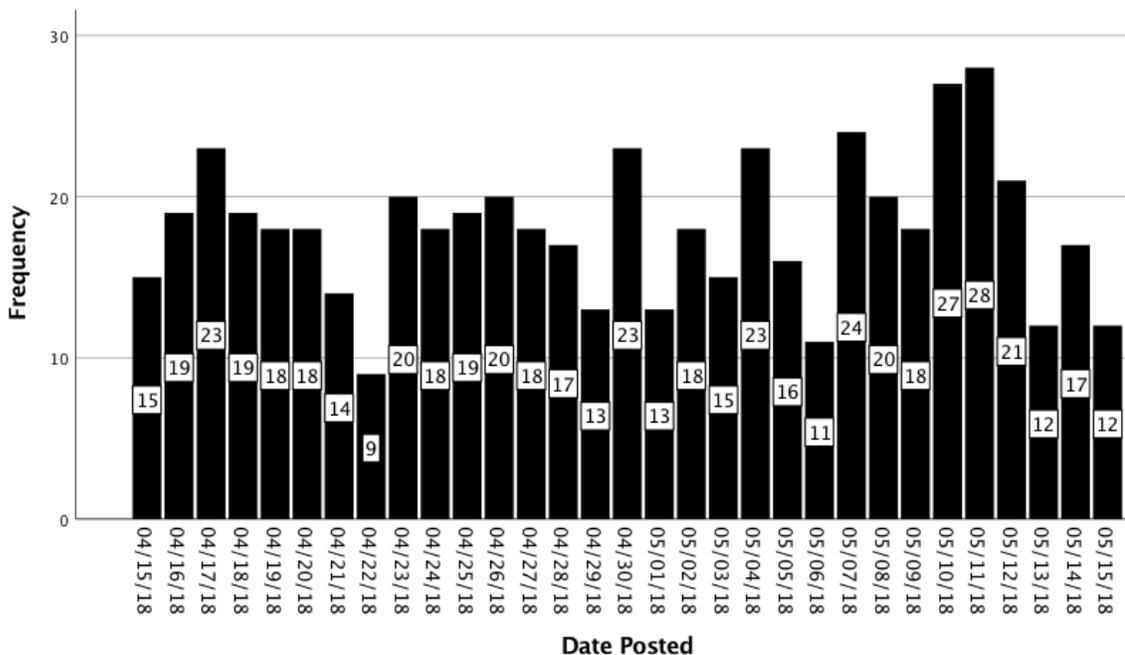


Figure 5. Total Posts Per Day During Content Analysis

Another way by which social media utilization was measured was by the comparison of Facebook and Instagram channels. Table 6 shows the results of a frequencies procedure run to determine the number of posts on Facebook and Instagram during the time of content analysis. It can be determined that the participating CVBs made more Facebook posts than Instagram posts during this time period. Of the posts analyzed during the study, about two-thirds (67.9%) were made on Facebook and about one-third (32.1%) on Instagram. As was reported in Table 4 above, the days of the week with the largest number of Facebook posts and Instagram posts were also not consistent.

Table 6. Number of Posts on Facebook and Instagram

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent	
Valid	Facebook	379	67.9	67.9	67.9
	Instagram	179	32.1	32.1	100.0
	Total	558	100.0	100.0	

These results align with two subthemes found in the semi-structured interviews in which six of the CVBs interviewed expressed that they were most active on Facebook, and two CVBs expressed that they are not active on Instagram. Two CVBs expressed they struggled to find new and fresh content for their Instagram pages, while another subtheme showed that needing fresh content was a general social media struggle for some CVBs. Another subtheme found shows that three of the CVBs in the study became active

on Facebook before any other social media channel, while other CVBs either began several social media channels at once or were unsure of when the channels began being used by their organizations. A subtheme related to the utilization of social media showed that five of the CVBs in the study have a blog run by their organization for their destination.

The use of a CVB blog was another subtheme found related to social media utilization (see Appendix D. Definition of Terms). Five of the CVBs in the study currently have a blog incorporated into their marketing strategies. The use of automated posting was the final theme found related to social media utilization. This use involves having a social media channel programmed to share posts directly from another channel without having to post directly to that page. This was found to be used for Twitter and event pages by the participating CVBs.

Two subthemes found under this objective related to the use of social media in conjunction with other forms of media. Eight of the ten participating CVBs discussed the importance of cohesive branding. CVB 9 explained, “It's so important for your message to be cohesive for you, for your brand to be strong and for all your elements to work to support each other as opposed to disjointed” (Appendix C). Bundling digital components with traditional media deals was another related subtheme. CVB 7 said, “We rarely commit to something in print that doesn't have a digital component as well just because you know we really like the trackability that comes with the digital” (Appendix C).

Widely Used Tactics

Research objective two of this study seeks to determine if certain social media tactics are more widely used by the participating CVBs. Frequencies procedures were run on all tactics analyzed during content analysis. Table 7 shows the tactics with their corresponding frequencies, means, and standard deviations in descending order of frequency.

Table 7. Frequency of Use of Social Media Tactics by Participating CVBs

Characteristic	No	Yes	Mean	SD
Other Content	3.9	96.1	.96	.195
Photo	13.6	86.4	.86	.343
Promotional	21.3	78.7	.79	.410
Tags	44.4	55.6	.56	.497
Hashtags	45.5	54.5	.54	.498
Signature Hashtag	48.9	51.1	.51	.500
Promoting Event	57.0	43.0	.43	.496
Ask Question	77.1	22.9	.23	.421
Promoting Destination/Attraction	77.6	22.4	.22	.417
DMO Web Link	79.2	20.8	.21	.406
Provide Info	84.4	15.6	.16	.363
Shared Other Post	86.7	13.3	.13	.339
Other Web Link	86.9	13.1	.13	.338
Contain UGC	87.6	12.4	.12	.329
Other Blog Link	88.0	12.0	.12	.325
Request UGC	88.5	11.5	.11	.319

Table 7 Continued. Frequency of Use of Social Media Tactics by Participating CVBs

Characteristic	No	Yes	Mean	SD
Provide Factual Info	90.3	9.7	.10	.296
Call to Action	91.0	9.0	.09	.286
DMO Blog Link	91.4	8.6	.09	.281
Contest	92.5	7.5	.08	.264
Promoting Restaurant	93.9	6.1	.06	.239
NTTW Hashtag	94.6	5.4	.05	.226
Video	95.2	4.8	.05	.215
Promoting DMO's Other Social Outlet	96.1	3.9	.04	.195
Provide Opinion/Review	96.2	3.8	.04	.190
Historical	96.8	3.2	.03	.177
Request Feedback	97.3	2.7	.03	.162
Congratulatory	98.6	1.4	.01	.119
Landscape	98.6	1.4	.01	.119
Promoting Hotel	98.7	1.3	.01	.111
Congratulating Others	98.7	1.3	.01	.111
Promoting DMO Site	98.6	1.1	.01	.103
Promoting Other Site	99.1	.9	.01	.094
Congratulating CVB	99.5	.5	.01	.073
Promoting Event/Meeting Space	99.6	.4	.00	.060

By running frequencies procedures for all social media post characteristics, it can be determined that about 96 percent (96.1%) of posts made by CVBs during the time of content analysis contained content other than simple text. This content included photos, videos, and shared posts. Some of the most widely used tactics by the CVBs during the

time of the study were the use of photos (86.4%), the use of promotional posts (78.6%), the use of tags (55.6%), the use of hashtags (54.5%), and the use of signature hashtags (51.1%). Posts promoting events (43.0%), asking questions (22.9%), promoting specific destinations/attractions (22.4%), and containing links to DMO websites (20.8%) were also widely used during the time of content analysis.

These results align with many of the subthemes found in the semi-structured interviews. Marketing local events via social media was one of the most widely found subthemes among the interviews. Promoting local attractions was also found to be a subtheme in many interviews. Signature hashtags were also found in interviews to be a tactic used by many of the CVBs. The term signature hashtag refers to the use of a specific hashtag to group posts from a specific destination together on social media sites, specifically Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter. This makes it easy for users and marketers to find all related posts in one place on social sites. When discussing the use of their signature hashtag, CVB 1 explained that it could be used on “anything from attending a festival, to...having a coffee on the lawn” (Appendix C), and by using it, they are able to “take that hashtag and place it on every piece of content that we push out” (Appendix C) on social media sites.

Although posting nostalgic or historical content and landscape or outdoor content were subthemes found during interviews, these two tactics had relatively low levels of frequency during the time of content analysis, with only 3.2% usage of historical content and 1.4% usage of landscape content found. The use of social media contests was a major

subtheme during interviews as well, and 7.5% of posts during the time of content analysis were part of a contest. These subthemes are some of the many found that deal with marketing certain assets of the communities in which the CVBs are located. Other subthemes related to this include using targeted posts dealing with arts and music tourism and food and beverage tourism. Other subthemes found dealt with targeting posts to young people, retired age individuals, females, families, and meeting and business travelers. Marketing their respective communities as welcoming and friendly was another subtheme found.

Targeted marketing based on location or proximity to the destination was a subtheme found in nine of the ten interviews. The marketing director from CVB 8 explained, “We always try to market to what we call the three to five hour drive time market, and so that's anywhere basically where prospective visitors could drive to us within a three to five hour drive time” (Appendix C). CVB 2 expressed that the proximity to the destination can change depending on the events which they are marketing, saying that they often have to decide if “this is something that people just an hour away will drive for or is it something that people would travel across the state of Texas for?” (Appendix C).

UGC was one of the most widely found subthemes amongst interviews, with nine of the ten participating CVBs expressing that they are using UGC and the other one CVB expressing that they will seek to use more UGC in the future. This included not only the use of User-Generated photos, but also partnering with local bloggers and influencers.

Two of the CVBs also use CrowdRiff, a software that displays UGC directly to their websites.

Tactics with Higher Perceived Benefits

Many subthemes found in semi-structured interviews dealt with the perceived benefits of certain social media tactics, correlating with Research Objective Three of this study. Half the CVBs in the study mentioned that they value engagement over the number of people simply reached by a post. This subtheme relates as engagement, including likes, shares, and comments, is one of the major perceived benefits of certain tactics.

The use of social media contests and giveaways was a subtheme found many times. Six of the ten participating CVBs expressed that contests have been a tactic with higher perceived benefits, most notably increased engagements and followers. However, two CVBs felt negatively about contests and their ability to increase engagement. CVB 1 said referring to previous contests, “They gave us a huge following, you know. It was, you know, this contest and enter to win, and we gained some followers there, but then I noticed that as soon as we gained them, we lost them because honestly it was about the quantity of the people. It wasn't the quality, so I'm a firm believer in organic growth” (Appendix C).

Informative posts and posts with links to the CVBs websites were two tactics with perceived higher engagement found to be subthemes in interviews. Videos were another subtheme related to perceived benefits. CVB 1 explained, “Now you have to make sure

that you have some type of video...to really gain people's attention. That's what they're looking at, and it can't be a really long video. It has to be quick and to the point because our attention span is so much shorter” (Appendix C).

Sponsored posts, including ads and boosting, were another subtheme found many times during the interviews. While discussing making posts related to an event hosted by CVB 8, the respondent stated, “We'll put a little bit of money behind the posts, and if we start selling tickets, we kind of think we're communicating that message well” (Appendix C). Because boosted posts are not labeled as such, and ads are not part of a page’s regular profile, there was no way to determine if a post was promoted. Therefore, this was not able to be noted in content analysis. For this reason, this subtheme is classified as one with perceived benefits. Changes in social media platforms, such as changes in Facebook’s algorithms related to how many followers see each post and Facebook’s rules on contests, were expressed as struggles related to engagement levels. CVB 5 stated, “It's not like it used to be, where businesses could get a lot of views and not spend a dime” (Appendix C).

Tactics with Higher Levels of Engagement

The fourth Research Objective of this study seeks to discover if higher levels of engagement can be earned by using certain social media tactics. These social media tactics can also be described as the characteristics of each post, such as the use of photos, videos, and website links. This objective also directly correlates to the three research hypotheses of the study, which speculate that higher levels of engagement can be found

on posts that involve UGC, contests and giveaways, or calls to action. These hypotheses were tested by performing independent samples t-tests on all tactics measured during content analysis and the corresponding engagement measures of the posts. Table 8 shows the results of the independent samples t-test run on all tactics and the mean number of likes for each post.

Table 8. Mean Number of Likes Per Post Containing Social Media Characteristics

Characteristic	No (Mean)	Yes (Mean)	t	df	p
Tags	22.79	48.69	-5.982	512.689	<.005
Other Blog Link	40.03	16.25	6.056	192.590	<.005
Photo	14.84	40.70	-7.003	266.982	<.005
Contain UGC	32.64	69.32	-5.297	556	<.005
Request UGC	15.17	40.03	6.893	234.450	<.005
Promoting Other Site	40.03	16.25	6.056	192.590	<.005
Promoting DMO's Other Social Outlet	38.04	16.18	4.286	34.790	<.005
Video	38.08	19.48	3.243	38.570	.002
Promoting Event	42.90	29.60	2.982	552.592	.003
Promoting Destination/Attraction	33.48	50.00	-2.972	556	.003
Promoting Restaurant	35.47	63.53	-2.895	556	.004
Historical	35.02	102.00	-2.596	17.251	.019
DMO Web Link	39.90	26.80	2.286	556	.023
Other Content	25.27	37.67	-2.134	30.676	.041
Shared Other Post	35.24	49.88	-1.928	90.729	.057
Other Web Link	35.13	50.82	-1.611	80.432	.111
Request Feedback	37.71	18.07	1.362	556	.174

Table 8 Continued. Mean Number of Likes Per Post Containing Social Media Characteristics

Characteristic	No (Mean)	Yes (Mean)	t	df	p
Hashtags	32.50	41.09	-1.838	556	.203
Signature Hashtag	34.14	40.09	-1.274	556	.203
Provide Factual Info	35.63	51.61	-1.287	56.563	.203
Contest	38.00	27.05	1.239	556	.216
Provide Info	35.58	45.82	-1.151	98.228	.253
Call to Action	37.98	29.04	1.094	556	.274
Congratulating CVB	37.36	3.33	1.066	556	.287
Promoting Event/Meeting Space	37.3	3.50	.865	556	.387
DMO Blog Link	37.79	30.71	.850	556	.396
Provide Opinion/Review	36.87	45.00	-.662	556	.508
NTTW Hashtag	36.63	46.83	-.604	30.087	.550
Promoting Hotel	37.33	25.29	.574	556	.566
Landscape	37.08	44.25	-.365	556	.715
Promoting DMO Site	37.09	45.33	-.364	556	.716
Congratulating Others	37.13	41.00	-.184	556	.854
Promotional	37.33	37.14	.033	556	.974
Congratulatory	37.19	36.63	.029	556	.977
Ask Question	37.20	37.11	.016	556	.987

It can be determined from these tests that there are significant relationships between the number of likes and the following characteristics: Tags, Other Blog Link, Photo, Contain UGC, Request UGC, Promoting Other Site, Promoting DMO's Other Social Outlet, Video, Promoting Event, Promoting Destination/Attraction, Promoting Restaurant, Historical, DMO Web Link, Other Content. These results show that posts that

contained tags, contained photos, contained UGC, requested UGC, promoted a destination or attraction, promoted a restaurant, contained historical content, or contained content other than strictly text had significantly more average likes than those that did not contain those tactics. They also show that posts containing links to outside blogs, promoted an outside website, promoted another social media channels, contained video, promoted an event, or contained links to CVB websites had significantly less average likes than those that did not. Table 9 shows the results of the independent samples t-tests run on each tactic in relation to the mean number of comments per post.

Table 9. Mean Number of Comments Per Post Containing Social Media Characteristics

Characteristic	No (Mean)	Yes (Mean)	t	df	p
DMO Blog Link	2.65	.79	3.520	486.013	<.005
Hashtags	3.70	1.48	2.349	276.535	.020
Signature Hashtag	3.51	1.52	2.256	304.626	.025
Promoting Event	3.18	1.58	2.054	371.957	.041
Tags	1.68	3.14	-1.834	369.651	.068
Contest	1.86	10.26	-1.572	41.078	.124
Other Web Link	1.92	6.30	-1.474	72.815	.145
Ask Question	1.92	4.42	-1.425	131.119	.157
Other Content	5.77	2.36	1.125	21.896	.273
DMO Web Link	2.71	1.66	.974	556	.330
Promoting Destination/Attraction	2.28	3.22	-.901	556	.368
Promoting DMO Site	2.46	5.67	-.759	556	.448
Promoting DMO's Other Social Outlet	2.55	1.09	.651	556	.515

Table 9 Continued. Mean Number of Comments Per Post Containing Social Media Characteristics

Characteristic	No (Mean)	Yes (Mean)	t	df	p
NTTW Hashtag	2.56	1.33	.634	556	.527
Promotional	2.05	2.61	-.528	556	.598
Congratulatory	2.52	.88	.447	556	.655
Congratulating CVB	2.51	.00	.420	556	.675
Congratulating Others	2.51	1.00	.386	556	.700
Promoting Hotel	2.51	1.14	.349	556	.727
Video	2.53	1.85	.331	556	.741
Other Blog Link	2.44	2.88	-3.28	556	.743
Provide Opinion/Review	2.47	3.14	-.295	556	.768
Promoting Event/Meeting Space	2.5	.5	.274	556	.784
Promoting Restaurant	2.47	2.82	-.193	556	.847
Promoting Other Site	2.50	1.80	.151	556	.880
Photo	2.36	2.51	-1.25	556	.900
Landscape	2.50	2.25	.067	556	.947
Shared Other Post	2.50	2.43	.054	556	.957
Call to Action	2.5	2.42	.052	556	.958
Request UGC	2.50	2.44	.046	556	.964
Historical	2.50	2.39	.043	556	.965
Contain UGC	2.50	2.49	.037	556	.970
Provide Factual Info	2.49	2.52	-.019	556	.985
Request Feedback	2.49	2.53	-.015	556	.988
Provide Info	2.49	2.49	-.001	556	.999

These results show that there are significant relationships between the number of comments and the following tactics: DMO Blog Link, Hashtags, Signature Hashtag,

Promoting Event. According to these results, posts during the time of content analysis that contained links to CVB blogs, contained hashtags, contained signature hashtags, and promoted events had significantly less average comments than those that did not contain those tactics. While all variables measured showed some type of relationship, these were the only ones that showed to have a significant relationship between the number of comments and presence of certain tactics. The mean number of shares associated with posts with each social media tactic were measured with independent samples t-tests, and the results are shown in Table 10.

Table 10. Mean Number of Shares Per Post Containing Social Media Characteristics

Characteristic	No (Mean)	Yes (Mean)	t	df	p
Hashtags	6.60	1.32	6.304	318.270	<.005
Signature Hashtag	6.17	1.38	5.998	360.648	<.005
NTTW Hashtag	3.89	.73	6.600	385.056	<.005
DMO Blog Link	3.94	1.38	3.927	148.566	<.005
Contain UGC	4.10	1.04	5.220	335.765	<.005
Promoting Restaurant	3.88	1.24	3.775	82.869	<.005
Other Web Link	3.00	8.51	-3.111	79.030	.003
Shared Other Post	3.99	1.95	2.704	172.994	.008
Other Content	11.91	3.38	2.288	21.465	.032
Provide Info	3.31	5.92	-1.898	103.871	.060
Contest	3.38	7.93	-1.898	43.278	.064
DMO Web Link	3.25	5.52	-1.763	140.124	.080
Tags	3.11	4.21	-1.405	530.140	.161
Promoting Destination/Attraction	3.39	4.87	-1.380	176.650	.169

Table 10. Mean Number of Shares Per Post Containing Social Media Characteristics

Characteristic	No (Mean)	Yes (Mean)	t	df	p
Promotional	4.78	3.43	1.362	556	.174
Call to Action	3.88	2.12	1.237	556	.216
Provide Opinion/Review	3.55	8.00	-1.257	20.516	.223
Provide Factual Info	3.56	5.19	-1.181	556	.238
Photo	4.83	3.55	1.084	556	.279
Other Blog Link	3.56	4.88	-1.056	556	.292
Promoting Event	4.08	3.24	1.033	556	.302
Ask Question	3.50	4.46	-.995	556	.320
Congratulatory	3.73	3.38	.103	.918	.350
Promoting Other Site	3.75	.20	.824	556	.410
Request UGC	3.62	4.53	-.719	556	.473
Request Feedback	3.76	2.20	.622	556	.534
Promoting DMO Site	3.66	9.33	-.634	5.020	.554
Promoting Event/Meeting Space	3.73	.00	.549	556	.583
Landscape	3.74	2.13	.474	556	.636
Congratulating CVB	3.73	1.33	.432	556	.666
Promoting Hotel	3.73	2.71	.279	556	.780
Video	3.70	4.11	-.217	556	.828
Historical	3.71	4.00	-.126	556	.900
Congratulating Others	3.73	3.29	.121	556	.904
Promoting DMO's Other Social Outlet	3.73	3.55	.087	556	.931

Results from this table show that there are significant relationships between the number of shares and the following tactics: Hashtags, Signature Hashtag, NTTW Hashtag, DMO Blog Link, Contain UGC, Promoting Restaurant, Other Web Link,

Shared Other Post, Other Content. These results indicate that posts containing links to outside websites had significantly more average shares than those that did not contain those tactics. They also show us that posts that contained hashtags, contained signature hashtags, contained National Travel and Tourism Week hashtags, contained links to CVB blogs, contained UGC, promoted restaurants, shared other posts, or contained content other than text had significantly less average shares than those that did not.

A subtheme related to these results involves the monitoring of social media analytics by CVB staff. All ten CVBs mentioned monitoring their analytics for engagement levels, many reiterating this subject several times. Seven of the ten CVBs also expressed that they use the analytics from previous posts to make decisions related to future content, which is another subtheme found related to this research objective. The final related subtheme was respondents following similar CVBs for the purposes of comparing posts and engagement.

Staff, Structure, and Stakeholders

The final major theme found from interviews is related to the staff, structure, and stakeholders of the CVBs. Fifteen corresponding subthemes were found during interviews. Statistical analysis was run on variables related to this theme, including the number of staff and the structure of each CVB.

Staff. A major subtheme found related to staff was the desire for more time and staff devoted to social media. This struggle was expressed in seven of the ten interviews conducted. Of the ten CVBs in this study, one had three total employees dedicated to

social media, while three CVBs had two total devoted staff, and six had only one employee responsible for social media. Two CVBs in the study expressed that they also use an outside marketing company for various parts of their social media marketing. Two also expressed that volunteers or interns assist with posting on social media sites for their organizations. Volunteers, interns, and staff from marketing companies was not factored into the number of staff at each CVB, but it should be noted that some do receive additional help from these sources in forming social media strategies, posting, and content creation.

One-Way ANOVA procedures were run on the variable of number of staff and the variables related to number of likes, number of comments, and number of shares to determine if engagement levels varied based on staff size. Tables 11, 12, and 13 show the results of the One-Way ANOVA procedure performed on number of staff responsible for social media and number of likes per post.

Table 11. Mean Number of Likes Per Post Based on Number of Staff

Number of Staff	Number of Posts	Mean Likes per Post	Std Deviation	Sig Between Groups
1	251	17.25	23.54	<.005
2	123	68.50	70.58	
3	184	43.43	62.69	

From this procedure, it can be determined that there is a significant relationship between the number of staff and the number of likes on the posts during the time of

content analysis ($F=43.05$, $df=2$ and 550 , $p<.005$). Posts from CVBs with two staff members had an average of 68.50 likes, while posts from CVBs with three staff members received an average of 43.43 likes, and those from CVBs with only one staff member had an average of 17.25 likes. Results of the Tukey test performed found three significant pairwise mean differences ($1<2$, $p<.005$; $1<3$, $p<.005$; $2>3$, $p<.005$). Table 12 shows the same procedure run on number of comments and the number of staff members.

Table 12. Mean Number of Comments Per Post Based on Number of Staff

Number of Staff	Number of Posts	Mean Comments per Post	Std Deviation	Sig Between Groups
1	251	1.94	5.479	.001
2	123	5.57	20.047	
3	184	1.18	2.302	

According to these results, CVBs with two staff members responsible for social media received an average of 5.57 comments per post. CVBs with one staff member averaged 1.94 comments per post, and those with three staff members averaged 1.18 comments per post. It can be determined that there is a significant relationship between these two variables ($F=7.501$, $df=2$ and 555 , $p=.001$). Two significant pairwise mean differences were found from the Tukey test performed ($1<2$, $p=.004$; $2>3$, $p=.001$). There is no significant mean difference between the number of comments on posts by those with one and three staff members. Table 13 shows the results of a One-Way ANOVA procedure on number of shares per post and number of staff responsible for social media.

Table 13. Number of Shares Per Post Based on Number of Staff

Number of Staff	Number of Posts	Mean Shares per Post	Std Deviation	Sig Between Groups
1	251	3.72	7.888	<.005
2	123	8.38	15.647	
3	184	.60	2.708	

These results show that there is a significant relationship between the number of staff dedicated to social media and the number of shares per post ($F=26.469$, $df=2$ and 555 , $p<.005$). Posts from CVBs with two staff members had an average of 8.38 shares. Posts from CVBs with one staff member had an average of 3.72 shares, while those from CVBs with three staff members had an average of .60 shares. Three significant pairwise mean differences were found from the Tukey test procedure ($1<2$, $p<.005$; $1<3$, $p=.001$; $2>3$, $p<.005$).

Some subthemes were related to employee responsibilities and priorities within the CVBs. The need to interact with followers, through both comments and messages, was a subtheme found in six of the ten interviews. This was viewed as a priority and in some cases a struggle to keep up with interaction on multiple platforms. Responding to followers' comments and messages in a timely manner was a subtheme found from six respondents, with CVB 7 expressing, "I respond as quickly as humanly possible" (Appendix C). Appropriately responding to negative comments and reviews was another subtheme found in interviews. In relation to staff priorities, two of the CVBs expressed that their staff value social media marketing over traditional forms of marketing. Six of

the CVBs discussed that they are currently seeking to move more funds to their social media marketing budgets, and six of the CVBs also expressed that more money has been moved to social media in recent years. All ten CVBs discussed the importance of keeping up with industry trends through various webinars and conferences related to their industry.

Structure. The posts of participating CVBs were coded by structure and One-Way ANOVA procedures were performed to determine if there were significant relationships between the structure of the CVBs and the engagement levels of their respective posts. All participating CVBs can be classified as a part of a Chamber of Commerce, City Government Department, or County Government Department. Because only one CVB was a County Government Department, this category combined with the City Government Department category in order to obtain more accurate results. Table 14 shows the results of the procedure run on number of likes per post and CVB structure.

Table 14. Number of Likes per Post Based on CVB Structure

Structure	Number of Posts	Mean Likes per Post	Std Deviation	Sig Between Groups
Chamber of Commerce	204	41.05	4.223	.208
City/County Government	354	34.95	2.757	

The results of this analysis show that there is not a significant relationship between the number of likes per post and the posting CVB's structure ($F=1.590$, $df=1$ and

556, $p=.208$). CVBs that were part of a Chamber of Commerce had an average of 41.05 likes per post, while those part of a City or County Government Department had an average of 34.95 likes per post. Although a relationship was found, it was not significant. Table 15 shows the results of a One-Way ANOVA procedure performed on the number of comments per post and CVB structure.

Table 15. Number of Comments per Post Based on CVB Structure

Structure	Number of Posts	Mean Comments per Post	Std Deviation	Sig Between Groups
Chamber of Commerce	204	1.12	2.206	.017
City/County Government	354	3.28	12.759	

These results indicate that there is a significant relationship between the number of comments per post during the study and the CVB structure ($F=5.743$, $df=1$ and 556, $p=.017$). Posts from CVBs which were part of a Chamber of Commerce received an average of 1.12 comments, while posts from those which were part of a City or County Government Department received an average of 3.28 comments. Table 16 shows the results of a One-Way ANOVA procedure run on the number of shares per post and CVB structure.

Table 16. Number of Shares per Post Based on CVB Structure

Structure	Number of Posts	Mean Shares per Post	Std Deviation	Sig Between Groups
Chamber of Commerce	204	.75	2.791	<.0005
City/County Government	354	5.43	11.517	

It can be determined that there is a significant relationship between CVB structure and the number of shares per post ($F=32.486$, $df=1$ and 556 , $p<.005$). CVBs part of City or County Government departments had an average of 5.43 shares per post. CVBs part of Chambers of Commerce received an average of 0.75 shares per post.

Stakeholders. Various stakeholders have immense impacts on the strategies, functions, and structure of CVBs. Some stakeholders discussed in interviews included Tourism Advisory Boards and City Government Administration. These can greatly affect CVBs as they often have hands in budget and staffing decisions for the organizations. Some other stakeholders discussed were hotels, retail stores, restaurants, and downtown businesses, all of which are impactful on CVBs because they are major assets in the marketing of communities. Hotel occupancy rates were another related subtheme found. Some respondents expressed that it can be difficult to track the effects social media campaigns can have on hotel occupancy. CVB 1 explained, “Our return on investment, our true return on investment, equals how many hotel rooms did we book out of this campaign, and that's been the hardest thing for me to prove, just to show a direct connection” (Appendix C). These factors can vastly affect available funding through

Hotel Occupancy Tax revenue, which is where many CVBs receive their partial or even complete budget funding. This was another subtheme found in interviews.

The participating CVBs expressed various levels of support and understanding by their stakeholders. Two CVBs expressed that their stakeholders have been slow to adapt to social media as part of marketing strategies. Five CVBs discussed that stakeholders have been supportive, but they have also needed additional knowledge on the subject of social media. While discussing if stakeholders understand the value of social media as a marketing tool, CVB 10 explained, “The boards are really just now starting to (understand) now that they... get a monthly report on the insight growth and everything, and for a lot of them... you still have to go over what exactly...reach means, what it means to get a new page like, you know, so they're starting to. They're grasping on slowly but surely” (Appendix C). Having stakeholders who are understanding and supportive of the use of social media was a subtheme found in five of the interviews. The subthemes found related to staff and stakeholders can all have large impacts on the social media strategies and tactics employed by the CVBs.

CHAPTER V

Discussion

This study sought to fill a gap in literature related to social media use in local destination marketing by analyzing the social media utilization, tactics, and goals of ten Texas Convention and Visitors Bureaus (CVBs). Content analysis was performed on the posts published on Facebook and Instagram by ten participating CVBs over the course of one month, from April 15th to May 15th, 2018. The content analysis was coded into SPSS, and univariate descriptive, multivariate descriptive, and multivariate means procedures were performed on the resulting data. These procedures focused on the frequency of use of different post characteristics, as well as which led to higher engagement levels. For the purposes of this study, engagement levels were measured by likes, comments, and shares. It is important to note that shares only apply to Facebook as they are not easily tracked on Instagram, so they are not an appropriate measure for engagement on Instagram.

Four research objectives were stated in the Methodology. These stated with the intention to investigate the utilization of social media by CVBs in mid-size Texas towns, determine if some social media tactics are more frequently used by these CVBs than other tactics, determine if some tactics are perceived to have higher benefits, and investigate if some tactics could lead to higher rates of engagement. The subthemes found from open coding the interview transcripts can be categorized under major themes related to each of the four research objectives, plus one major theme related to

stakeholders, structure, and staff. A full list of themes and subthemes, including direct quotations from respondents, can be found in Appendix C.

It is clear from the results of both the qualitative and quantitative analysis that although all participating CVBs are currently utilizing social media marketing in some form, their tactics, strategies, and goals for use of these tools vary greatly, correlating with Research Objective One. Some CVBs are firmly focused on engagement levels, while others are still learning and adapting to what strategies work best for them. All participating CVBs had a higher number of posts on Facebook than Instagram during the period of the study, which aligns with the subtheme found pertaining to many of the respondents being most active on Facebook. The number of posts during the study varied greatly among all of the CVBs. The minimum number of Facebook posts from one CVB was five, and the maximum number was 97 during the course of the study. The minimum number of Instagram posts during the study was 0 and the maximum was 87. The utilization of CVB blogs was another subtheme found in many interviews. Two other frequent subthemes were the need for cohesive branding across all mediums and the trend of bundling digital content with traditional media deals.

It is evident from the frequencies procedures performed that many of the participating CVBs are using similar tactics in their social media marketing strategies, related to Research Objective Two. Less than four percent of the posts that were analyzed did not contain any content other than text. This is an important finding as it has been shown that posts containing other content are often more interactive and successful

(Marinigh, 2015). Posts promoting events and posts containing signature hashtags were two of the most frequently used tactics in content analysis. This directly aligns with findings from the semi-structured interviews as these were two of the most widely found subthemes of the entire study.

Over 86% of posts contained at least one photo. Although several respondents noted that they view videos as more beneficial than photos in terms of engagement levels, less than five percent of posts contained videos. This is one of several examples of tactics present in multiple interviews that had low frequencies of use during the time of content analysis. The use of historical content, landscape content, and social media contests were all subthemes found in interviews, but they had very low rates of use during content analysis. Because of the small number of these posts, it was difficult to get an accurate depiction of the engagement levels these types of posts can truly bring.

Research Objective Three was supported by many subthemes found in interviews. The use of social media contests was a tactic found in almost all interviews. While most found them beneficial in terms of perceived benefits, two expressed negative feelings about contests with the preference for organic growth noted as one reason for this. Sponsored posts, including boosted posts and ads, were a widely-found subtheme and were categorized under tactics with perceived higher benefits because of the researcher's inability to determine which posts contained paid advertisement. This information is only available to page administrators when viewing an organization's profile. Other related subthemes included the use of informative posts, videos, and links to CVBs' websites.

All three research hypotheses of this study relate directly to Research Objective Four of this study. The engagement levels found from posts with different characteristics were tested in several multivariate means procedures, and many related subthemes were also found in interviews. The original research hypotheses of this study stated that posts containing User-Generated Content (UGC), contest, and calls to action (CTAs) would result in higher levels of engagement. Each hypothesis tested revealed interesting conclusions. Research hypothesis one inferred that higher rates of engagement would be present for posts containing UGC. The use of UGC is a current trend in social media involving the use of content by various followers, visitors, bloggers, and other users outside of the organization itself. A significant relationship was found between the number of likes posts received and whether or not the post contained UGC. Posts containing UGC had an average number of 69.32 likes, while those not containing UGC had an average of 32.64 likes. A significant relationship was also found for posts requesting UGC. Posts requesting UGC had an average of 40.03 likes, while those not requesting UGC had an average of 15.17 likes. This finding is likely related to many consumers' feelings of trust toward UGC as a form of electronic word of mouth (eWOM) instead of strictly marketer driven content, as discussed in the Literature Review. A significant relationship was also found between the number of shares posts received and the presence of UGC; however, this relationship does not support the research hypothesis. It was found that posts containing UGC in the study received an average of 1.04 shares, while those not containing UGC received an average of 4.10 shares. This could be

explained by the fact that UGC is a common tactic used on Instagram, a site on which shares are not easily tracked and, therefore, are not an option for measuring engagement. There was not a significant relationship between the presence of UGC and the number of comments on posts, nor was there a significant relationship between posts requesting UGC and the number of comments or the number of shares.

Research hypothesis two inferred that contests would lead to higher rates of engagement. Significant relationships were not found between the presence of contests and the number of likes, comments, or shares on posts within the study. The third research hypothesis said that posts containing CTAs would have higher rates of engagement than those that did not. The term CTA refers to the request for any feedback or action on the part of the user in a social media post. These CTAs often prompt users to certain websites, ticket links, etc. There were not significant relationships present between posts containing calls to action and the number of likes, comments, or shares. This finding is not reliable as both CTAs and contests were used very infrequently over the course of the study. It is likely if more had been present, a different outcome could have been found.

Some other tactics found in this study to have significant relationships leading to higher average numbers of likes included posts containing tags, containing photos, promoting specific destinations/attractions, promoting restaurants, containing historical content, and containing content other than simple text. It was also shown that posts containing links to outside websites (other than the CVB's website) had a significant

relationship with the number of shares posts received. This resulted in a higher average number of shares on posts containing outside links than those which did not. For the purposes of this study, these tactics were shown to have higher rates of engagement. Tourism related to food and beverage was a subtheme found many times during the interviews, so this correlates directly with the conclusion that these posts did receive a larger average number of likes.

The final major theme related to staff, structure, and stakeholders. An interesting conclusion from this study is that having more staff members responsible for social media did not lead to higher rates of engagement. There were significant relationships between the number of staff and number of average likes, comments, and shares; however, posts from CVBs with two staff members had the significantly higher rates on all three measures of engagement. Therefore, it cannot be concluded that CVBs with a higher number of social media staff are receiving the greatest levels of engagement.

Overall, CVBs classified as City/County Government departments received a significantly higher number of comments and shares on their posts than those under Chambers of Commerce over the course of the study. Although CVBs part of City/County Governments also received a higher average number of likes per post, a significant relationship was not found.

Industry Implications and Best Practices

A practical implication from this study would involve more frequent use of certain social media tactics that have perceived higher benefits. While many respondents

expressed having successful social media campaigns from the use of tactics such as historical content, landscape photos, and videos, there were very few posts containing these characteristics in the study. Although there were few historical posts in the study, a significant relationship was found between the characteristic and the number of likes on posts in the study, affirming this subtheme. The use of tags, photos, and content other than simple text were all found to be tactics that led to significantly more likes, and these were also some of the most frequently found characteristics in the study, indicating that these tactics were both widely-used and potentially beneficial.

Results show that posts from participating CVBs with two full-time staff members responsible for social media had significantly higher levels of engagement than those with one or three staff members. This is an affirming finding for any CVBs with one social media staff member considering adding another; the potential benefits of having two staff members as opposed to one are clearly shown here. This finding could be due to having more time and staff for content creation and social media strategy planning.

All ten interviewees expressed that they monitor their social media analytics, making this one of the most widely found subthemes in the entire study. Many of the CVBs are actively tracking which types of posts give them the best levels of engagement.

This study revealed some widely used social media tactics by ten Texas CVBs and revealed some of these tactics to be more beneficial than others in terms of engagement. It also found some of the strategies, priorities, and struggles expressed by

social media staff at these organizations. It is the hope of the researcher that this study sheds some light on commonly used tactics and best practices of local CVBs in relation to social media marketing.

Best practices. The following tactics and tips were outcomes of this study that can be noted as best practices for social media marketing professionals in Texas CVBs.

- Effective posts should contain content other than simple text. This could include videos, photos, link previews, or shared posts. Posts containing one item other than text were found to have a higher average number of likes.
- Posts containing tags, photos, or historical content were found to have a higher number of average likes, as were posts promoting specific destinations/attractions or restaurants. Posts containing links to outside websites had higher average number of shares. These post characteristics can be seen as effective tactics.
- Posts in this study from CVBs with two staff members responsible for social media had significantly higher levels of engagement. All CVBs in the study had between one and three staff members responsible for social media, not including interns or volunteers. This result shows having more than one responsible party can be greatly beneficial to social media engagement levels. It also shows that, in some cases, quality strategies are more effective than a greater quantity of employees, since those with three

staff members did not receive average levels of engagement.

- Monitoring social media analytics is an important part of planning and executing a social media strategy, and one that was used by all CVBs in this study.
- Interaction with followers was mentioned many times in interviews and is a vital part of social media management for CVBs. Answering followers' comments and messages provides a quick and easy way for potential visitors to receive information about destinations and can raise levels of engagement on social media pages.
- Many CVBs in this study expressed their use of signature hashtags for their destinations. When used, these hashtags group posts about destinations together and can be easily viewed and monitored through both Facebook and Instagram, potentially giving CVBs access to large amounts of usable User-Generated Content (photos, videos, blog posts, etc.) for their own social media pages if users give consent to having their content shared by the page. The monitoring of these signature hashtags, as well as geotags of the destination, can be an effective best practice for gathering new content.

Recommendations for Future Research

Posts and interviews from a relatively small number of CVBs were analyzed in this study. A future research recommendation would be to perform the same content

analysis over a longer period of time, such as a quarter or full year, for a wider range of results. Expanding the study to include more destination marketing organizations (DMOs) would be another recommendation. This study focused on CVBs, the most local type of DMO, but other, more regionally based DMOs could also be researched. This could include DMOs from different parts of the country, in different budget ranges, and of various-sized towns. This would provide a broader look at social media use by each local DMO. There has also been little research done on DMOs at the state or regional level, so that could be the focus of another future study. This study could also be expanded to analyze other social media channels, such as Twitter, Pinterest, Snapchat, etc.

More focus could also be centered on blogs, e-newsletters, and other forms of digital media. Because cohesive branding and bundling digital media in traditional media deals were such frequently found subthemes, more research could also be done on the relationships between traditional, digital, and social media in DMOs' marketing strategies.

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APPENDIX A

Institutional Review Board Approval

APPENDIX A

Institutional Review Board Approval



STEPHEN F. AUSTIN STATE UNIVERSITY

Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects in Research
P.O. Box 13019, SFA Station • Nacogdoches, Texas 75962-3046
Phone (936) 468-5496 • Fax (936) 468-1573

Chay Chay Runnels
Department of Human Sciences
PO Box 13014
Nacogdoches, TX 75962

RE: Project Title "Social Media Use in Convention and Visitors Bureaus" Case # AY2018-1165

TYPE OF RESEARCH: Thesis

FROM: Luis E. Aguerrevere, Chair, IRB-H

DATE: March 1, 2018

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Luis Aguerrevere".

I would like to thank you for submitting your project entitled "Social Media Use in Convention and Visitors Bureaus" to the IRB for review. It has been reviewed and has been **Approved**, based on the following review criteria:

CFR §46.101(b)(2) Research involving the use of educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures or observation of public behavior, unless:(i) information obtained is recorded in such a manner that human subjects can be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects; and (ii) any disclosure of the human subjects' responses outside the research could reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, or reputation.

Your project has approval through **March 1, 2019**, should you need additional time to complete the study you will need to apply for an extension prior to that date. The IRB should be notified of any planned changes in the procedures during the approval period, as additional review will be required by the IRB, prior to implementing any changes, except when changes are necessary to eliminate immediate hazards to the research participants. The researcher is also responsible for promptly notifying the IRB of any unanticipated or adverse events involving risk or harm to participants or others as a result of the research.

All future correspondence regarding this project should include the case number **AY2018-1165**.

APPENDIX B

Informed Consent Form

APPENDIX B

Informed Consent Form

INFORMED CONSENT

You are invited to participate in a study involving research that investigate how CVBs are utilizing social media marketing strategies. The goal of the study is to look at current uses and best practices for CVBs in mid-size cities in Texas.

If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to answer various questions on your perceptions and utilization of social media marketing of your destination. The phone interview will take approximately one hour to complete.

There are minimal risks associated with this study; potential loss of confidentiality. To prevent this, identifying data (i.e. name, etc.) will only be collected voluntarily. There is no tangible compensation for your participation in this study. However, the benefits of participating include the opportunity to critically reflect on your use of social media marketing.

Participation in this study is completely voluntary and your identity will remain confidential. You can refuse participation at any time. Your decision to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Stephen F. Austin State University. If you decide to participate, you may decide not to participate or answer any of the questions asked. You may also withdraw from the study at any time without damaging your relations with hospitality administration faculty or Stephen F. Austin State University.

For additional questions or concerns please contact:

Dr. Chay Runnels
Runnelse@sfasu.edu
936-468-2060

Carlie Allen
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936-635-3462

Dr. Amy Mehaffey
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936-559-2573

You will receive a copy of this informed consent via email.

This research study has been reviewed by the Institutional Review Board at Stephen F. Austin State University. For research-related problems or questions regarding your rights as a research participant, you can contact the chair of the IRB (Dr. Pauline Sampson) at SFASU at PO Box 13018, Stephen F. Austin State University, Nacogdoches, TX 75962, 936-468-2908.

Any concerns with this research may also be directed to the Office of Research and Sponsored Programs at 936-468-6606.

Before you can continue onto the study, please be sure you have read and understood the potential risks and benefits for your participation, as well as your rights as a potential participant. In addition, before you can participate in the study, please acknowledge you are 18 years old, or older.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

APPENDIX C

Semi-Structured Interview Themes and Subthemes

APPENDIX C

Semi-Structured Interview Themes and Subthemes

Theme 1: Utilization of Social Media

Automated Posts	Most Active on Facebook	Not Active on Instagram	Instagram-Need New, Fresh Content	CVB Blog	Had Facebook First	Cohesive Branding	Bundle Digital Deals	Need Fresh Content
10:9	2:12	2:22-23	10:16	1:29	5:17	3:46-48	4:44-46	4:90-95
8:422-429	10:8	10:13	6:12-14	3:6	10:12	4:69-76	4:233-238	4:98-103
6:21-24	10:12			2:1	6:19	4:79-81	7:112-117 "...we rarely commit to something in print that doesn't have a digital component as well just because you know we really like the trackability that comes with the digital."	10:54
	9:11			2:152-156		4:185-188	7:123-130	
	7:10-11			7:50-54		5:51-52	6:56-58	
	8:85-87			6:14-16		2:123-125		
	6:12			6:281-285		2:152-159		
						10:45-47		
						9:45-50		
						9:70-975		
						9:235-243 "...it's so important for your message to be cohesive for you for your brand to be strong and for all your elements to work to support each other as opposed to disjointed.		
						8:104-123		
						8:145-155		

APPENDIX C

Semi-Structured Interview Themes and Subthemes

Theme 2: Widely Used Tactics, Part 1

Events	Seeking to use more UGC	UGC	Signature Hashtags	Location/Proximity	Targeting Families	Targeting Females	Promote Attractions
1:98-101	4:232-233	1:418-425	1:249-257 "It (using the hashtag) could be anything from attending a festival to you know having a coffee on the lawn, that we were able to take that hashtag and place it on every piece of content that we pushed out. And now that, you know, when I go back and look at that metric and compare that hashtag to other hashtags that are used around the city, it's you know blowing everybody out of the water.	1:314-315	1:358	1:326-327	3:84
1:121-125	2:283-288	1:532-543	1:403-405	4:135-136	3:79	4:146	3:87
1:240-242	10:117-122	3:120	1:418-424	5:84	4:146-148	2:198	4:129-130
1:325	7:61	4:176-177	1:534-536	5:86-87	10:75	2:201-204	4:138-139
1:334-337		4:231	2:289-297	5:92-93	10:81	10:76	10:82
1:344-346		5:134-135	10:94-95	2:205-214	8:435-438	7:230-231	10:84-87
3:15		10:97-99		2:218-227 "...I take a look at what the content is and is it more of 'hey this is something that people just an hour away will drive for or is it something that people would travel across the state of Texas for?"			7:35-36
3:90-93		10:117-125		10:69-73			8:290
5:85		9:100-102		10:76			8:296-297
5:87-88		9:152-153		9:124-129			6:156-157
2:191-192		9:165-166		9:149			6:166-167
2:197		9:199-203		7:216-229			

Theme 2 Continued: Widely-Used Tactics, Part 1

2:245-247		7:65-71		8:250-261 "...we always try to market to what we call the three to five hour drive time market, and so that's anywhere basically where prospective visitors could drive to us within a three to five hour drive time"			
10:9		7:155-158		6:157-159			
10:75		7:274-281		6:163-164			
10:79-80		7:325-342					
10:92		8:395-417					
6:207-215		6:40-44					
6:217-218		6:112-118					
6:222-233		6:281-344					
		3:120					
		6:289-344					
		1:540-541					
		5:134					

APPENDIX C

Semi-Structured Interview Themes and Subthemes

Theme 2: Widely Used Tactics, Part 2

Nostalgia and History	Landscape/Outdoor	Winery/Brewery/ Food tourism	Art/Music Tourism	Welcoming Community/ Atmosphere	Target Young People/Millennials	Market to Retirement Age	Market to Meeting/Business Travelers
4:130	1:305-308	1:312	1:300-305	5:84-85	1:328	1:328-329	1:213-226
2:187	3:76	1:337	1:310-312	5:87-88	1:329-333	4:154	1:322-323
10:84-85	4:135	1:358-359	1:324	2:189-192	5:98	5:99	1:348-356
10:87	4:176	3:77-78	1:335-337	7:201-209	7:37-40		7:191-196
8:234-245	5:83	9:140-146	3:78				6:173-178
8:267-268	5:103	7:35	4:131-133				
6:159-161	2:18-21	8:209-211	4:139				
6:171	9:101	8:277-283	7:34-35				
	9:147-149	6:172-173	6:172				
	9:155-156	6:184-198	6:184				
	7:240-242	6:202-205					
	7:245-250	6:218-222					
	8:216-222	6:233-234					
	8:269-276						
	8:300-303						
	6:161-163						

APPENDIX C

Semi-Structured Interview Themes and Subthemes

Theme 3: Tactics with Perceived Higher Benefits

Contests Beneficial	Contests Not Beneficial	Link back to website	Sponsored, ads, boosted	Informative	Videos	Changes in social platforms	Engagement valued over reach
3:99-102	1:391-396 "You know we ran several early on. I ran some contests through some other organizations to other partnerships, media buys, and such. They gave us a huge following, you know. It was you know this contest and enter to win, and we gained some followers there, but then I noticed that as soon as we gained them, we lost them because honestly it was about the quantity of the people. It wasn't the quality, so I'm a firm believer in organic growth because your organic growth, and the people that follow you, the people that are, you know following somebody is like getting into me is like you know when you go somewhere and there's that VIP area, and they have the red velvet rope"	1:131-152	3:56-65	3:15	1:226-234 "Now you have to make sure that you have some type of video to really you know gain to really gain people's attentions. That's what they're looking at, and it can't be a really long video. It has to be quick and to the point because our attention span is so much shorter.	1:205-213	1:391-439
4:171	1:409-417	5:103-104	5:68	5:105	1:363-365	4:99-101	1:448-464
4:175	1:425-439	6:79-86	5:97		4:98-101	5:62-63 "It's not like it used to be, where businesses could get a lot of views and not spend a dime"	1:521-523
4:185	6:240-243	6:243-244	5:113-114		5:68	7:147-148	4:210-220
4:188-191			10:91-92		5:103	7:252-268	5:78

Theme 3 Continued: Tactics with Perceived Higher Benefits

2:232-235			7:225-232		2:231-232	7:282-287	10:66-67
2:242-243			8:277-283		9:87-90		10:108-111
2:245-246			8:317-323		6:216-217		7:165-170
9:99-100			6:135-144		3:92-93		7:185-186
9:152			3:22				7:310-316
7:254-268			8:207-229 "...we'll put a little bit of money behind the posts, and if we start selling tickets we kind of think we're communicating that message well..."				
7:281-282			6:135-136				
8:310-317							
8:323							

APPENDIX C

Semi-Structured Interview Themes and Subthemes

Theme 4: Tactics with Higher Levels of Engagement

Monitors Analytics	Post Content/Perceived Benefits to Inform Future Posts	Follows Similar CVBs
1:108-110	1:510-511	4:261-268
1:443-448	4:108-112	10:101-103
1:468-511	4:194-198	8:329-348
3:68	5:73-74	6:149-152
3:71-72	2:181-182	6:250
3:106-109	2:258-268	
4:106-112	10:61-64	
4:197-198	9:56-60	
4:202-206	8:166-170	
5:123		
2:161		
2:257-258		
2:274		
10:61-64		
10:105		
9:56-60		
9:94-100		
9:180-182		
7:283-287		
7:297-304		
8:182-199		
8:265-267		

Theme 4 Continued: Tactics with Higher Levels of Engagement

8:353-364		
6:69-71		
6:136-144		
6:148-152		
6:259-264		
6:269		
5:56		

APPENDIX C

Semi-Structured Interview Themes and Subthemes

Theme 5: Staff, Structure, and Stakeholders, Part 1

Interns/ Volunteers	Seeking More Money for Social	Public/ stakeholders slow to adopt	Stakeholders needing knowledge but Supportive	Staff value social over traditional	Respond in timely manner	Conferences And Webinars	More money moved to SM
10:19-21	3:21	3:42-43	1:108-125	3:44-46	1:546-584	1:67-73	1:67
8:30-35	4:38-39	3:52-54	5:38-39	10:47-49	4:244	1:589-611	3:21
	5:61-61	10:47-49	5:42-44		4:246-247	3:127-128	3:26-28
	10:26-29 "...over the last year (we) have been really working to get some of that money pulled away from things like old billboards and maybe older versions of promotional stuff and allocate more money towards Facebook and social sites."	10:52-55	5:61-62		2:301-305	4:256-260	5:31-33
	10:57-59		2:94-99		10:128-129	5:147	2:81-84
	8:59-62		2:127-131		9:207-212	2:316-325	7:76-88
	6:91-95		10:36-40 "...the boards are really just now starting to (understand the value of sm) now that they kind of, you know they get a monthly report on the insight growth and everything and for a lot of them you know you still have to go over what exactly like reach means, what it means to get a new page like, you know so they're		7:347-353 "...I respond as quickly as humanly possible."	10:134-137	6:52-58

Theme 5 Continued: Staff, Structure, and Stakeholders, Part 1

			starting to. They're grasping on slowly but surely"				
			10:52-55			9:218-224	
			7:98-106			7:151-155	
						7:357-371	
						8:448-457	
						8:103-104	
						6:446-456	

APPENDIX C

Semi-Structured Interview Themes and Subthemes

Theme 5: Staff, Structure, and Stakeholders, Part 2

Understanding, supportive stakeholders	Need more time/staff for SM	HOT Tax	Hotel occupancy rates	Responding to neg comments/reviews	Interacting with followers	Outside Agency
3:32-34	1:157-201	1:111-116	1:264-293 "...our return on investment, our true return on investment, equals how many hotel rooms did we book out of this campaign, and that's been the hardest thing for me to prove, just to show a direct connection. I can say "hey look at all the activity that we had in social media. here are the numbers of the reach and the impressions"...but can I directly connect a campaign? I haven't. I haven't been able to."	4:244-246	1:177-201	9:26-29
3:40-41	4:86-87	4:8	2:106-108	4:247-250	4:73-76	9:153-154
4:58-61	4:94	9:60-63	9:107-109	6:351-441	5:111-112	9:172-175
5:44-46	5:112-113	7:181-182	7:175-187		2:12-15	8:104-123
8:84-96	9:81-83		8:225-229		2:29-33	
6:64-71	7:134-142				9:55	
	7:290-294				9:165-166	
	8:138-139				7:310-316	
	6:250-255					
	1:30					

APPENDIX D

Definition of Terms

APPENDIX D

Definition of Terms

The following key terms are used repeatedly throughout this study:

Blog: An interactive website on which writers (one or multiple) share stories, reviews, personal views, tips, and other information; short for weblog (Skrba, 2019)

Content Analysis: Research method in which the content of a specific medium (in this case social media posts) are analyzed and coded for statistical analysis

CVB: Convention and Visitors Bureau

DMO: Destination Marketing Organization

Engagement: Interaction from social media followers; includes likes, shares, and follows in this study

EWOM: Electronic Word of Mouth

Geotag: Social media characteristic used to group posts by their geographical location

Hashtags: Social media characteristic used to group like posts together; must begin with the # sign, ex. #ThrowbackThursday

HOT: Hotel Occupancy Tax

NTO: National Tourism Organization

NTTW Hashtag: Designated hashtag grouping posts pertaining to National Travel and Tourism Week

Organic Growth: Social media growth achieved without the use of paid promotion

Paid Promotion: Social media advertising through boosted and sponsored post; can be used to achieve a greater number of viewers, followers, interaction, or sales

Post: Social media update made by a person or organization; can include photos, videos, links, etc.

RTO: Regional Tourism Organization

Signature Hashtag: Original hashtag used by a page to group posts related to their organization together; can be used by both the organization itself and their followers

TACVB: Texas Association of Convention and Visitors Bureaus

Tag: Social media characteristic used to link a post with other pages, events, or people

UGC: User-Generated Content

Web 2.0: Internet sites that are more interactive than traditional sites, including social media sites, travel review sites, etc.

VITA

After completion of her degree at Central High School, Pollok, TX, in 2010, Carlie Allen entered Stephen F. Austin State University in Nacogdoches, TX. She received a Bachelor of Science degree in Hospitality Administration from Stephen F. Austin State University in May 2014. After this, she worked as the Assistant Manager at Shelley's Bakery Café in Nacogdoches, Texas. In January of 2017, she entered the Graduate School of Stephen F. Austin State University. She worked as a Graduate Assistant in the School of Human Sciences from January 2017 to May 2018. During this time, she also worked as the Main Street and Communications Assistant for the City of Nacogdoches. In July of 2018, she accepted a position as the Sales, Marketing, and Guest Relations Manager at Splash Kingdom Waterpark in Nacogdoches, TX. She received the degree of Master of Science in December of 2019.

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