

## Travellers, Facebook, and the Stage of Readiness to be Involved in Volun-tee Tourism

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— *Review of* —  
**Integrative  
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### ABSTRACT

Electronic virtual social networks, such as blogs, Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn, have been used by profit and non-profit organisations as a medium to communicate with their stakeholders. This study was focussed on a Facebook group of an international volunteer organisation and addressed to understand behaviour relating to volunteer tourism (VT) of its members on social media. VT is an intersection of tourism and volunteerism that requires participants to combine tourism and volunteer activities in a destination. It is claimed as a tourism product that supports green, responsible, and sustainable tourism. The aim of this study is to understand the stage of readiness of respondents to be involved in VT. The objective of this paper is to understand stages of readiness of travellers to be involved in VT. The author studied trends among volunteer tourists and potential volunteer tourists. Data was analysed by means of a content analysis. The author found that the conversations among members of a VT organisation on its Facebook wall indicated their stages of readiness was started from the contemplation stage and followed with preparation, action, and maintenance stages.

**Keywords** – Volunteer tourism, social media, Facebook, stage of readiness, communication model

### 1. INTRODUCTION

For people who are passionate both about volunteering and travelling, reading trends on a volunteer tourism (VT) provider's Facebook wall is all about excitement. Future, current, and prior volunteer tourists were questioning, answering, sharing, liking, and advising one to another. The author believes that, observing the conversations just reminds him of the stage of the readiness in which participants indicated that each of them was in a certain stage: contemplation, preparation, action, and maintenance (Prochaska & DiClemente, 1983, 1986; Prochaska & Norcross, 2001). Unfortunately, this has been on less attention by prior researchers on social media and stage of readiness relating to VT.

Social media have been used by profit and non-profit organisations as a medium to communicate with their stakeholders (Farrow & Yuan, 2011; Tichy, Tushman, & Fombrun, 1979; Valenzuela, Park, & Kee, 2009; Waters, Burnett, Lamm, & Lucas, 2009), particularly for marketing and/or Public Relations (PR) activities. From the individual users perspective, virtual social networks give them an expectation of the benefits, such as for social interaction (including finding classmates, dating, finding people who share one's interests, making friends), habitual pass time, information sharing, professional advancement, and relaxing, (Acquisti & Gross, 2006; DiMicco et al., 2008; Joinson, 2008; Smock, Ellison, Lampe, & Wohn, 2011).

Having been observed by the author, International volunteer and VT organisations, like International Volunteer HQ (IVHQ), Global Vision International (GVI), Volunteer Service Abroad (VSA), AVIVA, and Volunteer Eco Students Abroad (VESA), therefore also social media too, particularly Facebook.

## 1. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 1.1. Volunteer tourism

Volunteer tourism in Indonesia is not as popular as in other South East Asia countries like Cambodia, Malaysia, Thailand, and Vietnam. Even so, there was a movement that can be categorised as volunteer tourism when some people travelled from one place to another. It relates to instead of just holidaying, it involved volunteering as well (Tendean, 2010). In tourism field, we may call them as volunteer tourists. Volunteer tourists are about people who:

- (a) Combine volunteering and tourism activities in a travel destination whether within their own country or abroad;
- (b) are motivated by altruism and egoism/hedonism aspects;
- (c) pay all costs, such as on transport, accommodation, meals, and registration and financially contribute to the project itself;
- (d) work at various volunteer projects, such as education, humanity, disaster, social, health, construction, and conservation;
- and (e) organise the journey alone or through an organisation (Suhud, 2013, p. 19).

### 1.1. Stage of readiness

As the author said earlier that VT is indeed far beyond popularity in Indonesia as well as in other countries, actually. Therefore, this study took an international setting. Using the theory of stage of readiness, people who are unaware of something can be located them at the very ground of the stage.

Prochaska and DiClemente (1983) developed the stage of change in their study to understand stages when and why people change their health behaviours, particularly in smoking. These researchers outlined the stages as: pre-contemplation, contemplation, action, maintenance, and relapse. In other study, Prochaska and DiClemente (1992) revised the stages of change to be pre-contemplation, contemplation, preparation, action, and maintenance. Further, by other researchers (for example, Demark-Wahnefried, Peterson, McBride, Lipkus, & Clipp, 2000; Dijkstra, Roijackers, & Vries, 1998), the stage of change is adapted to the stage of readiness.

Stage of change or stage of readiness has been applied by prior researchers in various setting, for example, in smoking cessation (Acton, Prochaska, Kaplan, Small, & Hall, 2001; DiClemente et al., 1991; Dijkstra et al., 1998; Etter & Sutton, 2002; Guo, Aveyard, Fielding, & Sutton, 2009; Prochaska & DiClemente, 1983); in alcoholism treatment (DiClemente & Hughes, 1990); in healthful eating (Curry, Kristal, & Bowen, 1992; Nothwehr, Snetselaar, Yang, & Wu, 2006; Vallis et al., 2003; Wolf et al., 2008); in volunteering (Cheang & Braun, 2001); in blood donor (Ferguson & Chandler, 2005; Lemmens et al., 2005); and in healthful behaviour (Carnegie et al., 2002; Demark-Wahnefried et al., 2000; Laforge, Velicer, Richmond, & Owen, 1999).

Furthermore, for PR and marketing practitioners, stage of readiness of public or customers may link to communication model as indicated on the table below. Smith (1993) presented five stages of purchase behaviour taken from various resources like AIDA (attention, interest, desire, and action), Lavidge and Steiner (awareness, knowledge, liking preference, conviction, and purchase), Adoption from E.M. Rogers (awareness, interest, evaluation, trial, and adoption), DAGMAR (unawareness, awareness, comprehension, conviction, and action), and Howard and Seth (attention, comprehension, attitude, intention, and purchase).

Comprehending stage of buying behaviour is essential. Smith (1993) mentioned that in developing a campaign, a practitioner should state marketing and communication objectives. Particularly for communication objectives, stage of readiness of audience does matter. Through this, the practitioners would prepare proper messages to be delivered by adjusting to which stage the audience exist (cognitive, affective, or behaviour stages).

## **2. METHODS**

The objective of this study is to understand conversations on the International Volunteer HQ's (IVHQ) Facebook wall. The reasons why this organisation's Facebook account was chosen, because (a) this is an open group, therefore anyone can be a member and all information is available on the wall and can be accessed by all members; and (b) with the members more than 21,000, this group is considered as one of the most active group, posting questions and answers so that we can find all types of conversations (asking and answering) almost every day.

The IVHG did not declare that this organisation included tourism activities in their program. However, some participants did volunteer in and marry the program with tourism activities. Therefore, the author considered that what members did and planned to do with was written on the Facebook wall as VT.

Further, the author limited only the postings within January 2013 after realising that all types of conversations were available within this period. To show the nature of the group, the author left the conversations as they were, for example, typo, grammars, lower/uppercases, and symbols.

## **3. RESEARCH FINDINGS**

The author benefited from data available from the Facebook wall of an international volunteer organisation. Many aspects relating to VT were revealed by the members, such as, country destination, type of volunteer projects, activities after volunteering, visa, tickets, and the volunteered. In this study, the author focussed only on the conversations associated with the stage of readiness. As mentioned earlier, the stage of readiness consists of precontemplation, contemplation, action, preparation, and maintenance. However, the author could not find any statement or question indicating that someone in the precontemplation stage.

The author picked some treads to represent in which stage the members of IVHQ were. In each tread, there were two members (for example, between two maintainers) or more in the same stage or across the stages (for example, among the contemplator, the preparer, and the actioner).

## a) The contemplator, the preparer, the actioner, and the maintainer

The conversation below occurred among a contemplator (CF), a preparer (NHF), an actioner (MH), and a maintainer (EA) as follows.

*CF: I'm considering signing up with my 2 kids...anyone else tried this? Thanks.*

*EA: There have been a few people who have volunteered with their kids in Ghana. I'm not sure if you're considering an African country but if you are Ghana would be a great choice. It's very safe, the people are wonderful and it's such a beautiful country. I spent 2 months there with my 1 year old last year and we never had any problems and I will be going back with him this year.*

*CF: Thanks EA! Sounds great. I haven't decided about the destination so Ghana now makes the shortlist. :-) What programme did you sign up for?*

*EA: Well I'm glad I could at least help you with the shortlist :) I volunteered in an orphanage many years ago (before I had my son). So when I go to Ghana (with our son) I stay with my husband but we always visit all the orphanages and my son absolutely loves it! He really enjoys spending time with all the children and they are all so lovely to him.*

*NHF: I am going to go with one of my daughters - she'll be 16 by the time we do the trip - Ghana has moved to our first choice. We are hoping to go this summer.*

*MH: Hi CF, I've just come back from Kenya where I volunteered with a mum and her 12 year old daughter. Also, just as I was leaving, another mum arrived with her 9 year old son and everything went really well. Kenya was absolutely fantastic and the people were friendly and helpful all the time.*

## b) The contemplator, the preparer, the actioner, and the maintainer

The tread below occurred among a contemplator (LS), a preparer (CZ), an actioner (HL), and a maintainer (EL)

*CZ: Has anyone recently travelled to UGANDA? My husband and I are going for 3 weeks in August. We have never been there. Is it safe? Did you like it? We are doing orphanage work ;) Thanks for the input!*

*EL: I just lived there for three months with IVHQ. Loved Uganda so so much, felt safe the whole time!! I spent many days alone in Kampala and never had any problems. I plan on going back so will you; you will fall in love with the kids. Create a gofundme and try to get donations you will find places to spend it :)*

*CZ: Thank you!! We are so excited!! We have already started a donation page on our own and we are also holding a fundraiser garage sale, people all over have donated items for it! Hoping to raise a good amount of money!! Thank you for the input ;)*

*LS: I'm from Adelaide Australia and wanting to go to Uganda this year for 4-6 weeks to work in the orphanages. Just wondering if anyone else has gone from here and how much the total cost including flights and insurance was? If it's not too dear I'd like to go in June, otherwise ill save and go in November!*

The contemplator, the actioner, and the maintainer

The next tread was among a contemplator (GK), an actioner (ST), and a maintainer (LH):

- GK: Hey guys, I want to go to Costa Rica to work with the turtles... I would like to be able to release the turtles or at least have as much contact with them as possible. Is there a certain time of year when this would be more likely?*
- ST: If you go in the rainy season (July to November) you might see an arribada in Ostional. There is usually one or maybe two but it is never 100% certain when they will be. When I went we were lucky enough to catch one and then you are guaranteed to see hundreds or thousands of turtles. As for hatchlings, you can't really predict them, they just hatch 45-60 days after nesting.*
- GK: Thank you, can I request that I be placed in Ostional when I arrive in Costa Rica?*
- ST: I would request it before you go as they will already have you placed upon arrival and as spaces are limited at the turtle programs it is hard for them to switch you.*
- HL: I have been to Costa twice with the turtle program and had awesome experiences both times! Message me if you have questions!*
- LH: I went to Ostional last may for two weeks and witnessed an arribada. One of the coolest experiences of my life. They happen once a month. So depending if you go around the time the next one is hopefully your lucky enough to witness it. I really recommend bringing a small fan to plug in for personal use at night it gets very warm, especially sharing a room with 6 others and have only 3 fans! But I would go back in a heartbeat! Hoping to go back this may!*

c) The preparer and the maintainer

The tread below occurred among a preparer(JS) and a maintainer (AD).

- JS: Hi everyone! I'm going to Costa Rica in August for 2 weeks. Just wondering if it's a good idea to stay an extra few days to travel or if the weekends will be enough? My only concern about staying the extra few days is I'm coming by myself so I don't want to travel on my own when the program ends. Any advice would be appreciated :-)*
- AD: Hey JS, I just got back from the Costa Rica's teaching program two weeks ago. You will meet many people while you're there, many people do travel alone, so you won't have any issue finding someone to travel with you over the weekends! Also, you can work with the staff (they are so awesome and helpful) to find anyone who has schedules similar to yours so you guys can travel together after your program is finished. Don't pay for the weekly tour, it's so much cheaper to travel in your own!!*
- JS: Thanks Annie! How long were you there for?*
- AD: I was there for a little over two weeks for my winter break!*

d) The preparer, the actioner, and the maintainer

Not all actioners had a good time during their volunteering time apparently. KS(actioner) claimed that she had a hard time during her voluntary work in Cambodia.

- KS: Everyone writes such positive stuff on this page and I feel that reality is not represented fully. I have just returned from 4 weeks in Cambodia. The people*

*are wonderful!! I loved taking tuk tuks everywhere, and the kids were so affectionate :) It was a great experience and i certainly don't regret going however there were a few areas which didn't meet my expectations -the food was insufficient (we were all hungry (i lost 2kg do it can be a good diet) and did have to buy cereal, yogurt, milk - stuff like that, to fill up), the chicken and fish was full of small bones and meat was kept Unrefrigerated and flies loved it (I am vegetarian thank goodness), lots of tummy bugs and pains were around.*

*I was assigned teaching though I did not ask for a teaching assignment. We were given 1 day notice of the placement details. I was unable to prepare teaching materials or teach myself how to be a teacher! In my opinion we should be given a couple of hours of teacher training at the very least. Am not trying to be negative here - just recounting my experiences where they differed from my expectations.*

KS' report was commented by preparers (MM and AM), actioners (KB and EM), and a maintainer (KN).

*KB: I feel like that was not thought out at all. Some of your issues could have been addressed if you had just spoken to the CVF Staff. My advice to potential volunteers is, this is a developing country. Do not expect the same sort of standards you would at home because you won't always get them. You need to have an open mind. Cambodia is a wonderful place; you meet people and see things that will change you.*

*MM: Ahhhh all this talk makes me want to go to Cambodia! I heard it is MAGICAL! A wonderland for all senses!!! So jealous of y'all's experience. "Of course there are going to be bones in the fish and the chicken. They have skeletons." and that made me chuckle, too!!!*

*KS: It was awesome! MM - I can't wait for you to see the poor Cambodian chickens - they have barely any meat. And be veggie - you will stay healthier :) Julia Moody Reading all of this makes me want the summer to come faster! Can't wait. :)*

*MM: I like steak toooooo much to be a veggie. but i respect those who are... and impressed. i just don't have as much will power to say no to meat.*

*MM: I'm going to Peru for three months and I'm allergic to dairy. Hopefully this will not be a problem. Fingerscrossed!*

*EM: I was in Ghana for 3.5 months and am now in Guatemala for 2 with IVHQ! I often leave out the negatives so I don't deter other volunteers because they are both beautiful places to be. Just be flexible and open minded. That is all.*

#### e) The maintainers

The conversation below was between two maintainers (JM and PB). They badly wanted to join in another VT program but finance constraint stopped them from taking an action. Apparently, they knew each other in a volunteer program previously.

*JM: I'm jealous of everyone. I want to be going to another country again :( ps. Kenya is amazing.*

*PB: Yeah, seeing all the pictures gives me the itch to travel!!!*

*JM: Haha seriously if i had the money i wouldn't be sitting here, but i literally have about \$30 to my name atm :( Really need to find Job, then bring on India and Nepal!!!*

*JM: Are you going to come to our Cambodia reunion in 2014?*

*PB: Well, if I'm able I sure am!!!*

*JM: I'm sure you will :) I'm gonna try travel around Thailand and Vietnam afterwards*

#### 4. Discussion and conclusion

The findings of this study indicated that people who wrote on the Facebook wall were in pre-contemplation, contemplation, preparation, action, and maintenance stages. They showed that they knew already what VT was. Looking at stage of change or readiness developed by Prochaska and Norcross (2001) or any communication models showed by Smith (1993). The volunteer tourists and potential volunteer tourists started at the contemplation stage, followed with preparation, action, and maintenance stages.

- a) Contemplation, or contemplator is for individuals who were interested in a VT project. These people indicated a search of information relating their interests;
- b) Preparation, or preparer is for those who committed (registered) to a VT project, had decided a program type, an organisation, a country to visit and/or the date to go and some of them would keep searching information relating to their interests
- c) Action, or actioner is for those who experienced in a current or previous volunteer program, but they did not indicate that they had an interest or plan to be involved in another program.
- d) Maintenance, or maintainer is for individuals who experienced in a volunteer program previously and showed their interest or plan to be involved in another volunteer project, in any stages – contemplation, preparation, or action.

Furthermore, for those who had no experiences, the Facebook wall was used to ask and gather information and for those who had experiences, it was used to have them answer, share, and encourage future participants. Smith (1993)said, model communication may lead to the choice of PR or marketing communication tools.

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