THEORIZING WEB 2.0 PHENOMENA IN TOURISM: A SOCIOLOGICAL SIGNPOST

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The term Web 2.0 is currently on everyone’s lips; even the tourism industry is awash with decision makers who are frantically searching for standardized, practicable guidelines on how not to sleep through yet again what has been touted as the new era of the Internet Version 2.0—especially now that we are finally getting a handle on Version 1.0. As to be expected, the checklists and manuals we have long searched for that offer us instruction on how to encounter this phenomenon are for the most part lacking. This is not surprising when you consider confronting the challenges of an extraordinarily vague formulation. In workshops, symposiums, and congresses, people throw catchwords and technical terms about in an effort to describe what Web 2.0 stands for and determine its apparent meaning for tourism. Profound issues and attempts at explanations are rare indeed, and empirically verified statements are almost wholly lacking. Therefore, the aim of this article is to deliver a selection of sociological explanatory approaches, thereby creating the theoretical starting blocks for further research efforts. Consequently, the objective here cannot be to explain the theories in their entirety and discuss in detail their individual contributions to the various Web 2.0 phenomena. Instead, the goal is to bring to light starting points for a theoretically founded debate on the subject. The overview in the form of a table at the end of the contribution describes selected sociological approaches and puts them into the context of Web 2.0 and tourism by way of examples.

Key words: Web 2.0; Social web; Sociological theories; Action theory; Systems theory; Symbolic interactionism; Theory of dramaturgical action

Introduction

In just a few years, the Internet has established itself as an indispensable medium. Today, we often speak of an information, networked, or knowledge society in which almost every aspect of life has become dependent on the quality and availability of information. We frequently forget that major figures like Bacon, Taylor, Leibniz, etc., laid the foundations for this society and that the rapid developments are the consequence of evolutionary—not revolutionary—events. Mattelart (2003) makes an impressive observation in this respect: “The stakes of the new digital universe are too multiform and interdisciplinary to be left to technological determinism alone” (p. 3). This state-
ment is even more accurate when, as illustrated in the following, we consider Web 2.0, a collective expression that comprises both the technical, but above all social and societal, advancements of the Internet. The term is duly criticized for its vagueness, and far beyond an appropriate ISO definition, we are instead concerned with describing a wealth of concepts and principles that attempt to capture the essence of Web 2.0 (Alby, 2007). The current hype surrounding the now inflationary use of catch phrases surrounding the “interactive web” has also had an enormous impact on the tourism industry. This is not surprising because social activity and thus interaction and communication with members of a social system are inherent to travel, making tourism especially suited for Web 2.0 approaches along the entire customer buying cycle. However, Mattelart’s demand of interrupting the short-lived, technology-oriented point of view has already practically reached the point of exaggeration due to the strong emphasis of the social components of Web 2.0.

This article attempts to obtain a behind-the-scenes view of these developments through the discussion of a variety of theoretical approaches. “The theoretical lens should allow the viewer to catch a glimpse of reality, which if possible is better, clearer and sharper than the view that is completely devoid of theory” (Vester, 1999, p. 8). In particular for tourism, which is perceived to be an information business and is therefore subject to the dynamics of the information society, theoretical approaches for explaining Web 2.0 phenomena seem necessary especially when you consider that models and theories shed light on the nuts and bolts that must be mastered in practice.

Tourism in the Age of the Information Society

As early as the 1960s, communications scientist Marshal McLuhan analyzed the global information society and the corresponding abrogation of space and time. At the time, the information sector was developing alongside the agriculture, craft, and service sectors, as the division of labor within what had once been interrelated production processes demanded optimized coordination and, consequently, an improved supply of information (Egger, 2007). In response to the “market-pull approach,” information and communications technologies (ICT) were developed in order to keep up with the constantly growing demands on timely and targeted data processing.

Starting in the 1980s, PCs also become affordable enough for home use, and the Internet has been making its way through offices and living rooms for around 10 years now. Politicians recognized the need for promoting and regulating a burgeoning information society. Among other things, this led to measures for achieving the necessary media competency, in particular in the area of education and within the job market. The TIME sector, comprising telecommunications, media and electronics, is marked by a massive convergence of the individual subsectors (Egger, 2005), which consequently leads to a technologization of a number of areas of our lives. In addition to the computer, countless complementary devices have become pervasive in our society and the Internet Protocol offers the universal plug, so to speak, that we need to dive into the digital parallel world. The German philosopher Karl Jaspers formulated it remarkably accurately more than half a century ago: “It would be impossible to overestimate the emergence of modern technology and its impact on absolutely every area of life” (Jaspers, 1955, p. 98).

The modern tourism industry developed alongside this technical progress, and has been one of the largest branches of the economy worldwide since the middle of the 20th century. The rapidly advancing technological development of means of transport, the international expansion transportation connections, and professionalization on the part of the service providers were accompanied by increased leisure time and financial resources along with a growing urge to travel.

Because tourism can be seen as a social phenomenon, it is clear that all social changes have a direct impact on tourism and promote its dynamic nature accordingly.

Despite the tourism industry’s seemingly slow development, it has already become the largest branch of eCommerce. Some voices in the economy ask justifiably: How can the tourism industry adapt to the demands of Web 2.0 when it is not even capable of fully realizing the potential of Web 1.0? Numerous analyses and studies prove
that there is enormous customer potential within the online travel market. According to AGOF Internet Facts, 84.2% of all German Internet users take advantage of the web for researching information on travel and tourism products and over 53% have purchased tourism services via the Internet and/or paid to access these services online (Arbeitsgemeinschaft Online Forschung [AGOF], 2006).

Most tourism service providers now find themselves between the development stages II and III illustrated in Figure 1 and are thus confronted with increased intensity and complexity of value added, which require new operative, and in many cases also strategic, skills. New forms of interaction and communication improve the relative strength of the customer and present the supplier side with tremendous challenges. Web 2.0 applications put guests not only in the role of the “prosumer” (producer and consumer), but also the “produser” (producer and user). This makes them individual designers, planners, and evaluators, who become publicly active on the web.

Web 2.0: A Look Behind the Scenes

If the term Web 2.0 reached the “peak of inflated expectations” of the Gartner Hype Cycle in 2006, a year later it is already in the middle of the disillusionment stage. This is less due to the fact that the expectations placed on Web 2.0 were not fulfilled, and has much more to do with the fact that today the term represents a new self-image and increased self-assurance on the part of the makers and users of the Internet (Beck, 2007). Web 2.0 is often used in conjunction with the term “Social Software” (SSW); in some cases authors even use the phrases synonymously. However, for the purpose of this discussion Social Software is considered to be a subdivision of Web 2.0. Hippien (2006) defines Social Software as “web-based applications that facilitate the exchange of

![Figure 1. Development of the intensity of value added.](image-url)
information, the establishment of relationships and communication for human beings in a social context and are guided by specific principles” (p. 7).

SSW is based on the fundamental concept of self-organization, whereby the individual or the group is the focal point and a social reaction (social feedback) is facilitated by means of social ratings (comments on weblogs, assigning points, etc.). Here the focus lies less on the actual information and more on the structure that grows from linking the information together.

In order to further illustrate the phenomena of the new web generation in theoretical terms, it appears necessary to offer a rough overview of the most important basic principles of the participatory web in order to simultaneously create a vague distinction between it and its predecessor, Web 1.0. Thus characterized, the social network also exhibits numerous implications that are relevant for tourism companies in Web 2.0 (see Fig. 2).

Even though the terms Web 2.0 and Social Media are now more frequently encountered in scientific literature on tourism, most contributions describe the individual and typical phenomena only in a very descriptive manner and do not question their basis. Buhalis and Chung (2008) find that “a comprehensive understanding of multidimensional social structures and complicated relations within modern society has gradually become a demanding task for researchers” (p. 267). It is therefore surprising that hardly any sociotheoretical approach is to be found in the framework of theoretical foundations and literature reviews, given the fact that it is precisely these approaches that could provide a well-founded basis. According to Schmidt (2006), “new media represent a socio-technical ensemble of artefacts, actions and forms of the social organisation” (p. 31). To that effect, it seems appropriate to use approaches from the currently developing research field of “New Media Studies” that examine ICT in the interplay between technological and sociological phenomena.

**Theoretical Approaches and Attempts at Explanations**

Vester (1999) finds the action theory to be an effective starting point for sociologically oriented issues because on the one hand it attempts to determine the social nature of human beings while

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**Figure 2. Basic principles of Web 2.0 (source: Kollmann & Häsel, 2007).**
at the same time taking into consideration “that society does not loom over mankind, rather it is mankind that makes society” (Vester, 1999, p. 13). Social action (i.e., action directed towards other people) is of interest when contemplating the social web. Both travel and computer-mediated interaction can be interpreted as (social) action in terms of Max Weber. Weber differentiates between four types of social action, although affectual–emotional action and, to an even greater extent, purposive–rational action are of particular interest for representational discourse on the subject. In economics, decisions are based on rational decision making processes (rational choices). Here preference orders are the only cognitive apparatus that can be used to select the best perceived option (Priddat, 2005).

Although tourism is a powerfully emotionally charged topic, rational decisions play a vital role. This is a result of the fact that tourism is an “immaterial, bilateral and personal” product (Schertler, 1994) and, due to their immaterial nature, services are merely promises of the possible performance capability of the provider. For potential buyers this leads to a certain amount of ambiguity, which must be overcome. ICT can make a significant contribution here through its ability to address the prevalent demand for information as quickly and effectively as possible (Egger, 2005). Depending on the completeness of the electronically assisted customer buying cycle, ideally from the interest to the information phase (e.g., the use of a ranking portal to assist in the information phase) to the follow-up phase (e.g., writing a travel blog or providing holiday videos), the involved parties’ situation-dependent decision and usage options blend together with respect to their role as internet users and as actors in a tourism context. Purposive–rational action is thus demonstrated in the decision to acquire more information on the hotel to be booked (with the aim of reducing ambiguity), but also in the rationally founded choice of media (with the aim of obtaining reliable information). It is important to note here that rationality in economic theory always refers to the means of achieving a goal and never to the actual goal of the actors themselves. An individual’s rational decisions are also based on intersubjective experiences. So, for a hotel ranking portal user, an intersubjective construction of meaning results whereby one refers to the aspects of the experiences one shares with others and that are considered to be typical. The (computer-mediated) communication creates the framework here: for example, deciding which alternative options are available for a final “rational choice” (Etzrodt, 2000). Without taking away from the details provided below on networks and communities, it is important to note here the present significance of social networks on the web, because these serve as “redundancy arenas in which old definitions are confirmed and new ones are absorbed and accepted (or rejected)” (Priddat, 2005, p. 230).

If we examine the objective in Mead’s Theory of symbolic interactionism, namely analyzing the influence of social groups on the experiences and behaviors of the individual, even this approach appears practicable in the context of this disquisition (Etzrodt, 2000). While Weber uses individuals and their actions as a starting point, the individual in the group is at the forefront of Mead’s considerations (Schneider, 2008). Communication and interaction are then only possible through the corresponding attribution of the meaning of “significant symbols” (Mead, 1973) of the actors. According to Blumer (1973), the following three premises apply: People’s actions towards “things” are based on the meaning the things have for them. The meaning of these things can be derived from social interactions; correspondingly, meanings are social products and are treated and modified in an interpretive process that people use when confronting the things they encounter.

To establish a relationship to Web 2.0 solutions in the tourism industry, we refer to hotel ranking platforms such as HolidayCheck and TripAdvisor. Here comments such as “the bathroom walls are mouldy and the tiles are loose” result in similar attitudes towards the hotel among the members of a community. If, for example, members attempt to create a spatial description of a property, phrases such as “secluded” are more problematic due to the subjective construction of meaning of the individual. Imprecise, semantic formulations thus require additional experience reports and opinions in order to obtain a true sense of reality. Web 2.0 solutions attempt to avoid this problem by using generally accepted ranking symbols, such as
awarding stars. The number of stars awarded illustrates the perceived value of a service and the accumulation of further assessments leads to the intersubjective and seemingly more credible evaluation mentioned above.

If symbolic interactionism is interpreted subjectively, a view is formed in which the individual plays an exceptionally active role in the social process (Etzrodt, 2000). This leads over to Goffman’s (1977) Theory of Dramaturgical Action, in which he uses a theater analogy to describe how individuals play various roles in everyday situations. Here the term “role” is seen as a set of behavioral norms bundled together. The development of a person’s identity, according to Mead and Goffman’s assumptions, is only possible through the interaction with other persons (Miebach, 2006). “It is not about what a participant ‘actually is.’ It is highly unlikely his partner will be able to find this out, assuming that it can even be recognized in the first place. What is important is the feeling conveyed by his behavior on what type of person is behind the role currently being played” (Goffman, 1977, p. 329). Goffman wrote this in reference to the traditional offline world, but in the context of the social web the full import of this statement becomes much clearer. With the Internet, a new, autonomous “area of orientation and action of social reality” (Thiedeke, 2004) has developed in which actors can slip into new roles anonymously. Because all of the contents of this world disintegrate into digital code and social reality only turns into virtual reality upon reconstruction of this code, reality conditions, ergo the roles and actors must be formed in a manipulative fashion. In the course of self-virtualization, the question is: Who or what do I want to be, how do I present myself in public, should I offer insight into my true reality—who is my virtual identity? Following Erikson’s “genetic continuum,” here we can refer to a “virtualization continuum” as a process of virtual identity development. Online worlds like Second-Life satisfy the desire for a virtual self-image almost perfectly. For example, Jas Capalini is the virtual alter ego of Gratistours Managing Director Jasmin Taylor, who assists online users in making travel plans and virtually whisks them away to their future travel destinations (Gratistours.com, 2008). The SecondLife concept from Starwood proves that virtual avatars possess real customer desires and that companies take advantage of their collective intelligence. The new Aloft brand in SecondLife was developed with the help of a prototypical hotel designed in line with customer desires (email communication with M. Gagolou, 2008). Here the participating actors play different roles on a variety of reality levels and take part in a set of scenarios that are constantly alternating between reality and fiction. They act as physical internet users and potential tourists whose needs and desires they attempt to execute virtually in their role as cyber architects (Fig. 3). A parallel world negotiated on this level ultimately offers a path back to reality. In the case of the Starwood project, the brand Aloft has now been completed; eight real hotels have already opened and 76 additional hotels are being planned worldwide (Starwood Hotels, 2008).

Although all is quiet on the SecondLife front these days, even those who prophesized its downfall some time ago will acknowledge that this might be the first 3D world, but it certainly will not be the last. According to a study by Gartner, by the year 2011 around 80% of all Internet users will own one or more avatars (Pettey, 2007). (An avatar is the virtual representation of a real person.) However, users do not necessarily need an avatar in order to present themselves in cyberspace. Almost everything we do can be used by others to gain an impression of ourselves—and we can use almost everything we do to control this impression (Schütz, Machilek, & Marcus, 2005). Self-presentation can thus be understood as target-group-dependent teamwork. E. Jones and Pittman (1982) discuss five strategies for self-presentation. In this discussion, ingratiation, self-promotion, and exemplification are of particular interest. The strategies of self-presentation are sometimes incompatible with one another, which for example may lead the actor to contemplate whether he would rather be seen as friendly or competent. (In our context, for example, it would need to be proven empirically how often this results in distortions on ranking platforms.)

As shown in Table 1, social web applications assume a variety of functions and self-presentation takes place within the scope of identity management (Döring, 2003). Moreover, the table illus-
trates that blogs in particular take over the function of identity management. The blogosphere is growing by 120,000 new blogs every day where formerly passive recipients are now becoming active users who document their experiences and knowledge as “user-generated content” (UGC) and make it accessible to the global public. Tourism also has a special status here, a fact confirmed by a Blogjungle study. According to this study, the topics “travel and tourism” are the most important blog topics among German Internet users (Blogjungle.de, 2007).

Both of the remaining functions, relationship and information management, also fulfill a central function for social web solutions and therefore have the most significant impact within virtual networks. To move from the micro level of individual action to the macro level of supraindividual structures and obtain a closer view of virtual networks, we refer to the Concept of Usage Practice (Schmidt, 2008). Social action is always determined by a set of rules and resources. Participants act according to more or less fixed rules, which are both the result of and the basis for social action. In this context, Giddens speaks of the “Duality of Structure” in his Theory of Structuration, which refers to the recursivity of structure and actions (Giddens, 1988).

The actors’ intent to use is framed by three structural dimensions. The first of these includes the behavioral rules, norms, and conventions such as the usage and ranking conditions of virtual communities, for example. Relationships represent the second structural dimension. This refers to relationships formed or maintained with the help of applications. Social networks such as Facebook or the travel portal WAYN justify their very existence based on the creation and enhancement of social relationships. Basic elements of software technology, which enable certain types of actions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Function</th>
<th>Service</th>
<th>Prototypical Application</th>
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<tr>
<td>Identity management</td>
<td>Selective presentation of oneself (interests, opinions, knowledge, contact information, etc.)</td>
<td>Personal weblog; podcast; videocast</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship management</td>
<td>Maintaining and creating new relationships</td>
<td>Contact platforms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information management</td>
<td>Finding, receiving, and managing relevant information</td>
<td>Blogosphere; wikis; tagging</td>
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</table>

to take place, represent the final dimension. In this sense, the social web is characterized by an extremely high level of technical flexibility and modularity (Schmidt, 2008). Now mashups are embedded in nearly all travel portals, allowing for complex presentation and interlacing of content. [A mashup is the recombination of already existing content. Various media such as sound, images, text, video, and maps can be accessed from other web applications using open application programming interfaces (APIs) and integrated into one’s own site.] Social networks consist of knots and edges (the connecting lines) and thus depict relationship structures (Kröll, 2003; Schwarz, 2007). They are products of the system and therefore have a derivative benefit. This means that their value is dependent on their use. The decision of an actor to participate in the system or not is dependent on the functional use of the system and the number of participants within it. The basis for existence for these types of networks is thus dependent on achieving a critical mass. For instance, if we take TripAdvisor as an example of a virtual travel community, its value is the result of the articles created by its approximately 22.5 million community members. The system is only attractive when it attains this high number of users and user contributions. As described above, the members’ intent to use is framed by the structural dimensions, which only then enable individual identity, relationship, and information management.

Although the postmodern era is characterized by signs of fragmentation and individualization, in computer-mediated networks the group achieves an unexpectedly high level of regard (Schimank, 2000). [Schelske (2007) indicates with the statement “are these computer-mediated partners thus already a group, a community or a society, because they communicate with each other?” (pp. 108–109) the problems surrounding the term group in the context of computer-mediated communication.] Provided the structural framework exists, virtual communities are largely self-regulating and self-referential. When users write a comment in a travel blog, tag a holiday video, or write a travel report on a ranking portal such as Igougo, they are not simply engaging in personal identity, relationship, and information management. They are also unconsciously creating new structures on a collective level and aiding in the advancement of the network.

They can also be described as autopoietic systems in terms of Luhmann’s sociological system theory. This term originates from the field of neurobiology and describes self-creating and self-maintaining systems that establish their structures through their own operations. These operations have two effects: “On the one hand, they serve to establish the conditions for connecting operations, i.e. they propel the system into new historical scenarios from one moment to the next; on the other hand, they also offer the interorganizational structures required to achieve these connections” (Luhmann, 2008, p. 13). The emergence of new things from in some cases highly complex systems has been observed in nature since the beginning of time. A new generation of social software solutions is also based on the success principle that the whole is worth more than the sum of its parts. The bottom-up organization also known as “Emergence” (Breuer, 2004) is self-regulating. Similar to the Theory of Flocking Behavior, these types of systems do not possess a central coordinating point; instead, they adhere to a few simple rules. The initiation between the individual actors does not take place via a direct address or request to act, but subliminally by leaving traces behind. Comparable to termite colonies or bee swarms, collective intelligence results from an interplay between individuals guided by a set of laws. In addition, to leaving traces, the lifespan of the “messenger substances”—web content in our context—are of vital consequence. Because the Internet continuously secures traces of its users and even provides aids for tracking down specific content, it is ideally suited as a breeding ground for social behavior, and consequently, group behavior. This is how groups emerge spontaneously on the web to work on a new subject, solve problems, and introduce new content and structures (Breuer, 2004). (In this context we can reference the strong links to memetics and the new research field of web-based memes.)

In this connection, let us finally mention a project that in the future will certainly attract a great deal of attention and is highly relevant in the tourism industry, “Photosynth,” which is currently be-
ing jointly developed by Microsoft and the University of Washington. Photosynth technology recognizes outlines and distinctive points within a large collection of photographs of a location or an object, positions them in relation to one another and uses the collectively gathered photographic material to generate a corresponding three-dimensional web-based space in which people can move about freely (see Fig. 4).

The 3D model of Marcus Square in Venice emerged from the sum of a variety of different photographs from users who made their image material available on Flickr. In the future, this technology could be used to create a photorealistic image of tourist attractions from the sum of available holiday photos that users can visit virtually before actually embarking on their journey.

Summary

The opportunity of focusing increasingly on sociological theories and approaches should be seized, especially when researching new phenomena that revolve so closely around social aspect as the field of the Social Web. The reason for the lack of profound statements on the topic in the current literature on tourism science may be the rapid emergence of Web 2.0. The fact that the discussion is dominated mainly by descriptions consisting of empty clichés and phrases may also be due to this swift development. A search for attempts of defining Web 2.0 or Social Web is rarely fruitful (Xiang & Gretzel, 2010). In most cases, O’Reilly’s definition (2005) is used. However, this is also rather to be seen as an attempted explanation describing the seven principles (The Web as Platform, Harnessing Collective Intelligence, Data is the Next Intel Inside, End of the Software Release Cycle, Lightweight Programming Models, Software above the level of a single device, Rich User Experience) that are the pillars of the concept of definition. Web 2.0 and Social Web are, however, terms that are too multifaceted anyway for any effective working with them to achieve the desired objectives. Specific research interest hence rightly refers to a few partial aspects. The topic of “Virtual Communities in Tourism” was, for example, the target of numerous investigations in the past (e.g., Illum, Ivanov, & Liang, 2010; Gupta & Kim, 2004; Wang, Yu, & Fesenmaier, 2002; also see contributions in the conference proceedings of ENTER 2007, 2008, 2009. Information Technology & Tourism 10/4—Special Issue on Virtual Communities in Travel and Tourism). The sociological approach, however, is scarce. Wellman and Gulia (1998), on the other hand, have a point when they stress that the focus on social interaction that sociologists bring to this new field is a welcome counter-balance to the intense technological hype often associated with the Internet. Unfortunately, many researchers studying online communities seem not to know about the long history of studying community by sociologists.

Table 2 is to be seen as a guide. It provides an overview of selected sociological approaches and
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theory: Originator/ Use in Tourism</th>
<th>Core Message of the Theory</th>
<th>Examples: Reference to Web 2.0</th>
<th>Examples: Reference to Tourism</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Action Theory</strong>&lt;br&gt;(among others Max Smith, Max Weber) Application in tourism (Moutinho, 1987; Schmoll, 1977; Un &amp; Crompton, 1990; Wubah et al., 1976; Woodside &amp; MacDonald, 1994)</td>
<td>The Action Theory is based on the assumption that players communicate with each other and that they act because of the (subjective) meaning behind this (with instrumental rationality, value-oriented, affectual, and traditional). An action can be considered social if its meaning mutually refers to the action of others and orientates itself on that during its course. The Action Theory is a suitable theoretical starting point for numerous other considerations, such as ethnomethodology, the theory of rational choices, symbolic interactionism, structural functionalism, etc. The term “social action” is of particular interest here. Both computer-imparted communication as well as traveling as such can be seen as a “social action.” The Action Theory is often cited as the opposite of system theory.</td>
<td>Interaction in a virtual community, visiting online rating platforms, writing travel blogs, uploading holiday photos to Flickr or Facebook.</td>
<td>Planning journeys with the family, communication on site, buying souvenirs, telling others the things you have done and experienced there.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Rational Choices</strong>&lt;br&gt;(among others Adam Smith, Max Weber) Application in tourism (Moutinho, 1987; Schmoll, 1977; Un &amp; Crompton, 1990; Wubah, 1976; Woodside &amp; MacDonald, 1994)</td>
<td>Instrumental-rational action is targeted and purpose maximized. It is all about achieving the purpose in as efficient a manner as possible by choosing between the available alternatives using reason and by taking decisions on the basis of rationality. The human being as Homo economicus, or economic man, an individual acting in an economic manner. Especially applicable to economic decisions, above all in tourism often emotion-driven decision.</td>
<td>Using customer ratings as the basis for decisions; using meta search engines to gain a better overview of the alternatives on offer; planning one’s holidays using Google Maps.</td>
<td>Goal of reaching a holiday destination as efficiently as possible; efficient use of resources (time/money) on site; collecting travel information on-line and still contacting a travel agency too; motivation to make a journey during the off-season to be cost-effective.</td>
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<td><strong>Uses and Gratifications Approach</strong> (Elihu Katz)</td>
<td>Sociological Action Theory that can be attributed to the Rational Choices approach. Starting point and main field of application in media use research, with a focus on the recipient. The recipient/user decides as to if and how what media will be used based on his/her interests and requirements/needs.</td>
<td>Media use of rating portals, blogs, location-based services.</td>
<td>Media use of catalogues, guide books, etc.</td>
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<td><strong>Symbolic Interactionism</strong> (Georg Mead, Herbert Blumer) Application in tourism (Colton, 1987; Dann &amp; Cohen, 1991)</td>
<td>Comes from microsociology and has its roots also in the Action Theory. Symbolic Interactionism deals with the interaction between people—especially the influence of social groups. Starting point is the basic assumption that people act on the basis of the importance that objects, situations, and relationships have for them. Individual and society are in a reciprocal relationship to each other, which means that they are mutually dependent. By means of communication, symbols are negotiated and are accordingly interpreted by all members of society alike. The processes of ascribing meaning and interpretation are examined.</td>
<td>At the semantic level it would be tagging, for example (key wording as ascription of meaning) and selection/navigation by means of tags/tag clouds.</td>
<td>Elements of intercultural communication in particular—customs &amp; rituals (welcoming, thanking, complaining, etc.). Analysis of the habitus (Pierre Bourdieu) of tourists, uniform signs/symbols (i) for labeling information points.</td>
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<td><strong>Theory of Dramaturgical Action</strong> (Erving Garfunkel, Hough Mehman, Housten Wood) Application in tourism (Edensor, 2000; Fawcett &amp; Cormack, 2001; Holloway, 1981)</td>
<td>Subjectivist interpretation of Symbolic Interactionism. Individuals are assigned roles (codes of conduct); they are involved in a dynamic, modifiable process of interaction where the individual roles have to arrange themselves. Self-manifestation that finds its meaning in interaction and follows a dramaturgical concept. The self is put on a stage in public space (front stage); retreat and privacy are the backstage.</td>
<td>Self-virtualization through avatars, self-presentation in blogs, social networks, etc.</td>
<td>On his/her search for authenticity, the tourist tries to gain insight into the back stage and thus into the everyday life of the people living in the country she/he visits. Tour parties as “social gathering,” “face work”: interaction between tourists and service providers.</td>
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<td><strong>Ethnomethodology/Netography</strong> (Harold Garfinkel, Hough Mehman, Housten Wood) Application in tourism (Dann &amp; Cohen, 1991; Echtner &amp; Jamal, 1997; McCabe &amp; Stokoe, 2004)</td>
<td>Ethnomethodology is a method of understanding what practical, everyday action is used to create social reality. Researchers orient themselves along precise descriptions of methods with which a society or group acts. Ethnomethodology hence tries to show how action works in everyday life. Special form: netography—identifies and observes on-line communities and saves, stores, analyzes, and interprets dialogues between community members.</td>
<td>Analysis of on-line communication in travel blogs, forums, and social networks. Identification of opinion leaders, lead users and early adopters provides clearly defined user insights and user understanding.</td>
<td>Analysis of processes used to take a decision on traveling within the family. In addition to the analysis of everyday action, the documentary method of interpretation and the method of conversion analysis are mainly used.</td>
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<td>Theory of Structuration (Anthony Giddens, Lucas Sanders)</td>
<td>Core Message of the Theory</td>
<td>Examples:</td>
<td>Examples:</td>
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<td>--------------------------------------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>Use in Tourism</td>
<td>Tries to explain the relationship between the individual and society and/or the transition between action and structure. Social action is determined by a set of rules of resources. Action creates structures that in turn form the framework for further action. “In and through their action, the actors reproduce the conditions that make their action possible” (Schwarz, 2008). This theory has recently become popular beyond the fields of sociology and social theory not least in organizational and management theories and at the business management level.</td>
<td>In social networks, new rules of behavior, standards, and codes can emerge when users use the system/application to keep up relationships.</td>
<td>Concepts of sustainability in tourism. Ecologically sustainable action, for example, creates the framework and structure for new ways of acting.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Capital (among others Norbert Elias, Pierre Bourdieu, Theodor W. Adorno)</td>
<td>Social Capital describes the collectivity of all current and potential resources through mutual knowledge and/or recognition. Social capital provides access to the resources of social life, such as support, recognition, knowledge, etc. Social capital is created through the readiness to cooperate and presupposes trust as well as mutual support.</td>
<td>Use of social networks to obtain recommendations for travel planning.</td>
<td>Locals recommending a restaurant; front desk officers at the hotel giving directions, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>System Theory (among others Talcott Parsons, Niklas Luhmann) Application in tourism (Kaspar, 1978; Leiper, 1979; Mill/Morrison, 1985; Sessa, 1985; Woods &amp; Caldwell, 2006)</td>
<td>The System Theory is rooted in numerous disciplines (sociology, biology, psychology, political sciences, etc.). The sociological system theory is a macrosocial approach interested in the structures and modes of function (structural functionalism) of complex social systems. The functions of social systems can be described with Parsons’s AGIL scheme (adaptation, goal-attainment, integration, latency).</td>
<td>Analysis and description of structures of social networks and the function they adopt.</td>
<td>Applying the AGIL scheme to a hotel operation. (A)-adjustment of a hotel to its environment, (G)-corporate goals and concepts, (I)-social integration in the system (staff), (L)-corporate philosophy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theory of Flocking Behavior (Craig Rains &amp; Caldwell, 2006)</td>
<td>Theory from the natural sciences that analyzes the behavior in herds/social systems (social behavior of ants, flocks of birds, swarms of bees). Provides starting points for self-regulation and self-preservation of social systems and for collective intelligence.</td>
<td>Analysis and simulation of networks, their structures, and functions; e.g., collective intelligence in rating services (intersubjective opinion).</td>
<td>Explanation of phenomena of mass tourism.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Biographical Note

Roman Egger is a Professor at the Salzburg University of Applied Sciences and head of the tourism research department. He graduated in Communications Sciences and head of the tourism research department. And yet, how should valid data be obtained and how could serious statements be made about a phenomenon when the very foundation of this phenomenon has only insufficiently been explored? The present contribution attempts to look behind the scenes of Web 2.0. The rough presentation of individual, selected sociological theories and approaches has the intention of serving as an incentive for further, theoretically founded work. Web 2.0 is nothing new in general terms, which leads the author to believe that it is vital that secured (and wherever possible interdisciplinary) findings be examined and verified as to their usefulness and fitness for explanation and that they are adapted accordingly.

References


McCabe, S., & Stokoe, E. H. (2004). Places and identities...


