



# LOUISIANA OFFICE OF TOURISM SOCIAL MEDIA EFFECTIVENESS STUDY

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Report of Findings

Research prepared for the Louisiana Office of Tourism by Destination Analysts, Inc.

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## Introduction

### About this Research

Social media marketing is rapidly evolving and has fast become a mainstay in the destination marketer's arsenal. The State of Louisiana has not only made significant investments in its traditional online marketing, it has begun serious work toward developing an impactful presence in the social media space, using tools such as Facebook, Twitter, Flickr, Blip, Friendfeed and a Louisiana travel blog.

This research was undertaken to provide Louisiana with actionable market intelligence to guide its decision making regarding social media. We began this work with the belief that Louisiana's social media marketing will be most successful with a clearer understanding of the state's social media user base, the online landscape in which they exist, as well as the effectiveness (and potential) of social media to generate incremental visitation to Louisiana.

### Objectives

This research project is wide-ranging and, in many ways, experimental. To our knowledge, this is the first attempt by a destination marketing organization to research social media marketing from the DMO perspective. The two most important goals of this project were to: (1) form early estimates of the return on investment (ROI) of Louisiana's social media marketing effort and (2) the development of a best practices analysis for DMOs working in the social media space. The research, however, examines a diverse array of topics, including:

- Reasons for engagement with Louisiana social media tools
- The depth and quality of user engagement with the state's social media efforts

- User perceptions of the Louisiana travel brand
- Users' Louisiana travel intentions
- Preferred social media content options
- User satisfaction
- Place of residence
- Demographics

**Methodology:** The following three research components were included in this project. Each was conducted separately, yet each was designed to work cohesively with the others toward the end goals of the project.

### **1. Surveys of Louisiana Facebook and Twitter users**

Working with Miles Media and the Louisiana Office of Tourism (Louisiana Travel), Destination Analysts developed a multi-purpose survey questionnaire that was presented to two groups: Facebook fans and Twitter followers. While the state uses other social media tools, Twitter and Facebook are studied here as they are by far the most commonly used by consumers and likely the most impactful on their travel behavior. Additionally, the other tools used by Louisiana (Flickr, Blip, Friendfeed and a Louisiana travel blog) did not offer reasonable opportunities to survey users as did Facebook and Twitter.

These survey efforts began with posts on the Louisiana Travel Facebook and Twitter pages requesting that fans/followers take the survey. A private survey invitation was then manually sent directly to all of Louisiana Travel's fans (Facebook) and followers (Twitter). This increased the survey response rates significantly. When this project began, the state had 320 Facebook fans and 2,299 Twitter followers. In total, the effort collected 111 surveys from Facebook fans and 269 from Twitter followers.

### **2. Survey of Website Users**

A secondary survey was developed to address users of the Louisiana Office of Tourism's promotional website, LouisianaTravel.com. An intercept invitation was set up to be presented to every 10<sup>th</sup> visitor to the website,

asking them to take an online survey. The survey was fielded online for several months, until 600 completed surveys were collected.

### **3. Qualitative Analysis: In-Depth Online Interviews**

An important addition to the survey research described above was a series of in-depth online video interviews of Louisiana Travel's Facebook and Twitter users. This qualitative research allowed us to expand the project's learning tremendously. For this portion of the project, Destination Analysts recruited 20 persons from Louisiana's existing Facebook fans and Twitter followers<sup>1</sup>. We equipped these persons with web cameras and audio equipment, and conducted a 30-45 minute in-depth interview with each about their opinions on issues related to DMOs and social media. These interviews were recorded for later viewing and analysis. The findings emerging from these interviews (combined with learning from the three user surveys) were used to form the study's best practices analysis.

In beginning this research, it was our hope that these diverse research parts would combine to form a base of learning that would allow us to develop a clearer picture of the effectiveness and potential of the Louisiana Office of Tourism's social media efforts, as well as a set of best practices recommendations for the state to use in shaping the direction of its future social media communications. We believe we were successful in this effort.

#### **About this Report**

The surveys conducted for this project and the user interviews collected a very large amount of data. It is not the intent of this report to present all of this information. This report, prepared in this format at the request of Miles Media, summarizes what we believe are the two most important descriptive findings from this combined research: estimates of the return on investment of Louisiana's social media marketing efforts and a set of best practice

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<sup>1</sup> In their survey response, these persons indicated their interest in participating in follow-up research and signed-up to be considered.

recommendations. A supplemental paper presented jointly with this report contains detailed response profiles for each survey question.

## Marketing Insights

An examination of data collected in this project's three surveys and in-depth interviews reveals a number of important findings that the Louisiana Office of Tourism can use to evaluate and refine its social media marketing efforts. These key findings are detailed below.

### Facebook and Twitter Are Used for Different Reasons

Facebook and Twitter offer their users very different experiences. This makes for fundamental differences in why consumers use these tools. In both surveys of these users, respondents were presented a list of reasons for using Facebook or Twitter and were asked to state how important each reason is to why they use the application.

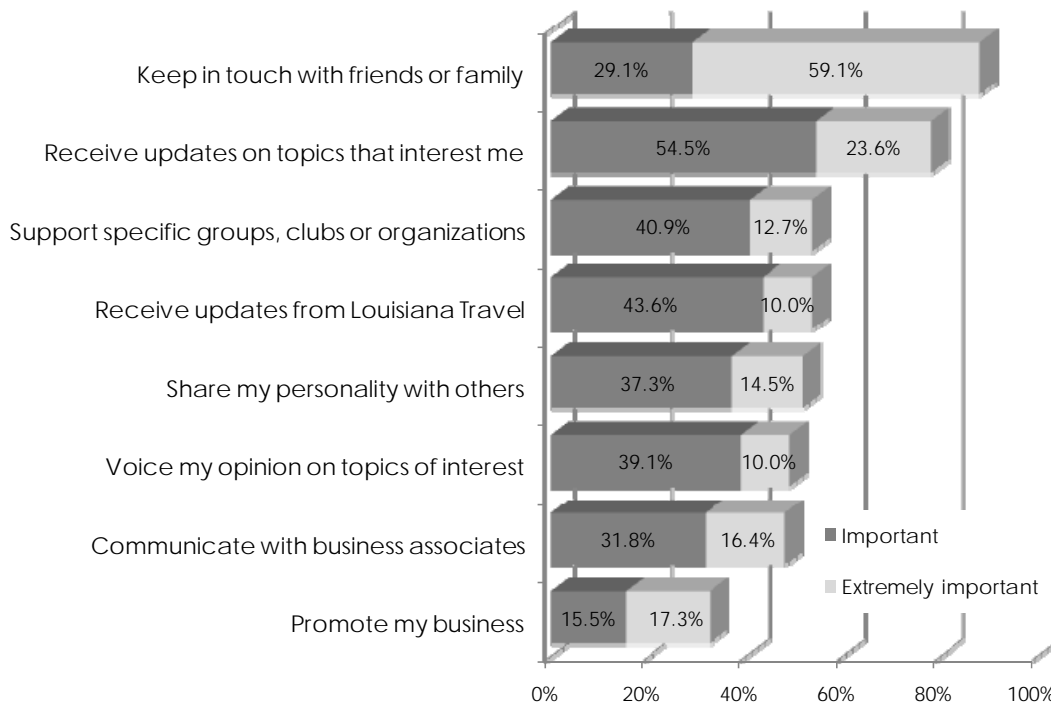
For both Facebook and Twitter, the percent of respondents who rated the various reasons as "Extremely important" or "Important" are shown in the figures following. An understanding of these differences is essential to developing effective strategies for using these tools to promote Louisiana. The following three findings should be noted:

- **Facebook users are primarily interested in using the tool to connect with their friends and family. Twitter users are not.** As Figures 2.1 and 2.2 (following) show, by far the most important reason survey respondents use Facebook is to "Keep in touch with friends and family." Nearly 60 percent of Facebook survey respondents said this was an "Extremely important" reason they use Facebook. By contrast, this was the least important reason Twitter users use this tool, with only 10.8 percent of survey respondents saying this was "Extremely important" to their use of

Twitter.

- **Twitter users are much more interested in using the tool to promote their businesses than are Facebook fans.** More than half of Twitter users (57.6%) said promoting their business was an “Important” or “Extremely important” reason for using the tool.
- **Twitter is used for keeping track of what’s happening in areas of user interest or concern, and less for social connection.** Selected by over 81 percent of Twitter survey respondents as “Important” or “Extremely important,” “Receiving updates on topics of interest” was by far the most significant reason why they use Twitter. This finding was strongly supported in the qualitative research done for this project. In user interviews, using Twitter was commonly described as something of a voyeuristic experience where one watches for updates on topics that interest them, rather than an experience of profound social connection.

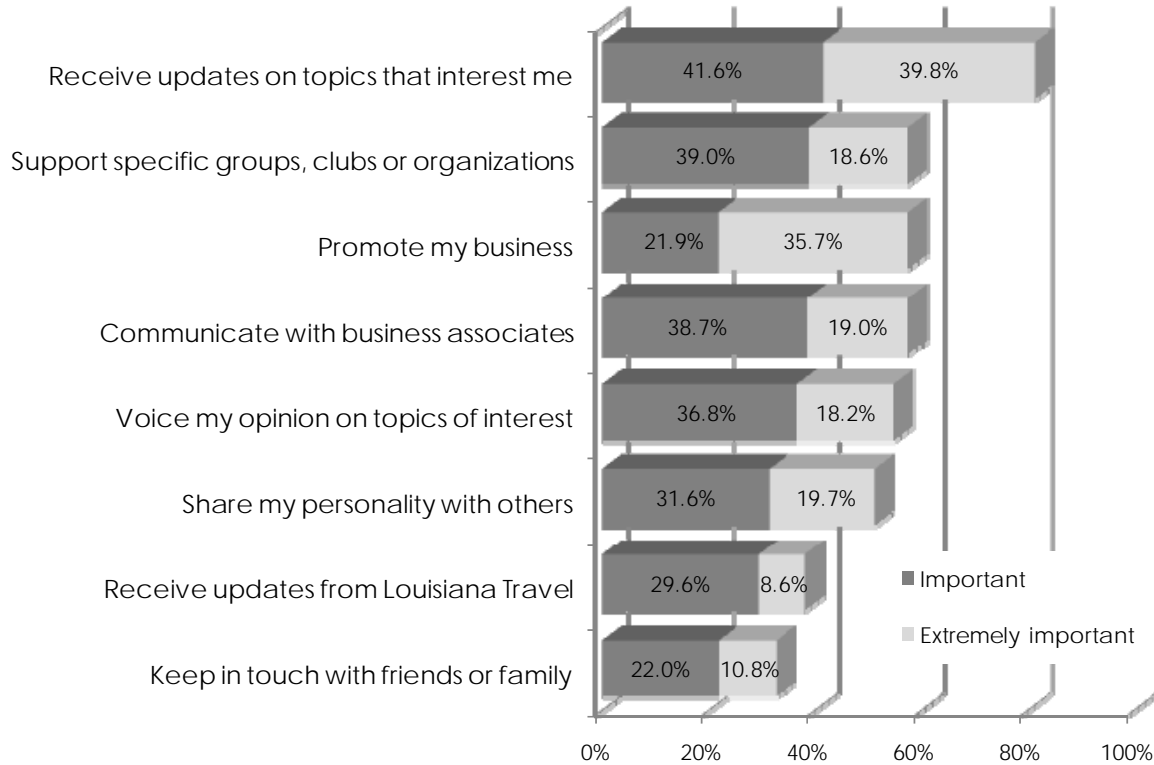
**FIGURE 2.1—REASONS FOR USE OF FACEBOOK**



**FIGURE NOTES** – Percent of respondents saying each reason is “Important” or “Extremely important” to why they use Facebook. Source: Louisiana Travel Facebook user survey.



**FIGURE 2.2—REASONS FOR USE OF TWITTER**



**FIGURE NOTES** – Percent of respondents saying each is “Important” or “Extremely important” to why they use Twitter.  
 Source: Louisiana Travel Twitter user survey.

## What do Social Media Users Want?

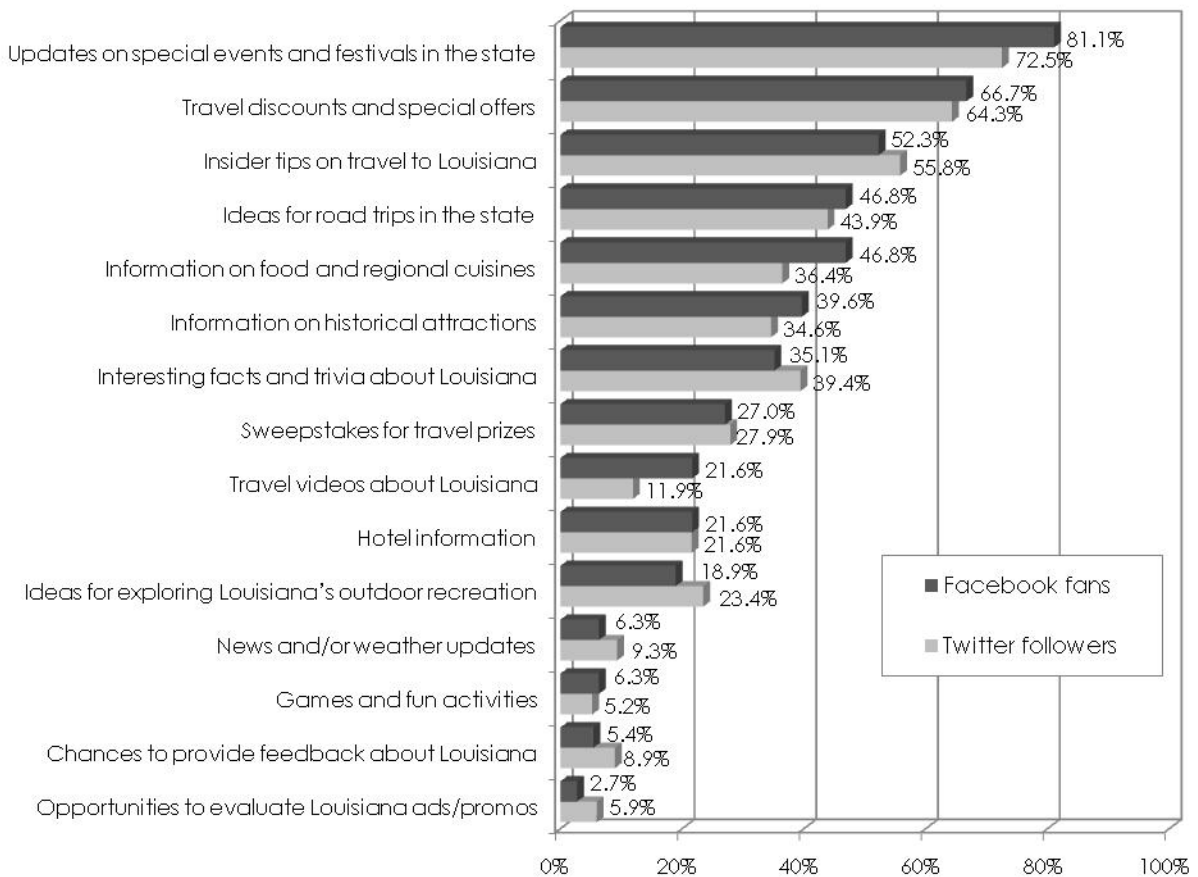
Providing its social media audiences with information that interests them will obviously be critical to Louisiana’s success. To address this question, survey respondents were presented a list of topics and asked to select those of which they would “most like to see” Louisiana post or tweet about. Figure 2.3 (following page) shows for each of these topics the percent of respondents who said they would like to see Louisiana Travel communicate this type of content.

Facebook and Twitter users were mostly consistent in their content desires, with the most popular content being “Updates on special events and

festivals in the state," "Travel discounts and special offers," "Insider tips on travel to Louisiana" and "Ideas for road trips in the state."

The answers given to this question also highlights differences between the Facebook and Twitter platforms. For example, Twitter followers were less interested in Louisiana Travel tweeting about "Information on food and regional cuisines" and "Travel videos" than Facebook fans. We suspect this is information that may be perceived as more difficult to meaningfully present through Twitter than Facebook.

**FIGURE 2.3—CONTENT DESIRED FROM LOUISIANA TRAVEL**



**FIGURE NOTES** – Percent of respondents selecting each information type as one of five they would most like to see Louisiana post via social media. Source: Louisiana Travel Facebook and Twitter user surveys.

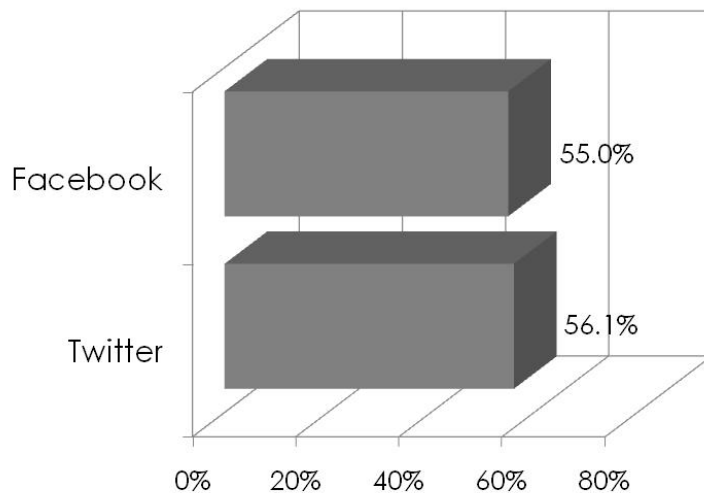
When asked to discuss content they would find the most interesting from Louisiana Travel, those that were interviewed for the qualitative portion of

this study closely mirrored survey respondents. “Festivals and special events,” “Activities in Louisiana” and “Discount travel offers” were consistently rated of highest interest. During these interviews, it quickly became apparent that festivals and special events are almost synonymous with the Louisiana travel brand, and several cited events as being a primary reason they follow Louisiana in these media. With deals, there are some that feel this is extremely important—almost imperative—to Louisiana’s presence in these media. There are others that won’t be interested. Also, many followers from out of state, particularly those from further distances, assumed that deals wouldn’t be applicable to them because of the planning window required for them to actually plan a trip.

### Louisiana’s Social Media Audiences Travel within the State

Louisiana is clearly reaching actual travelers through its social media efforts. As shown in Figure 2.4 (below), 55.0 percent of Facebook fans and 56.1 percent of Twitter followers surveyed had traveled within Louisiana in the previous 12 months.

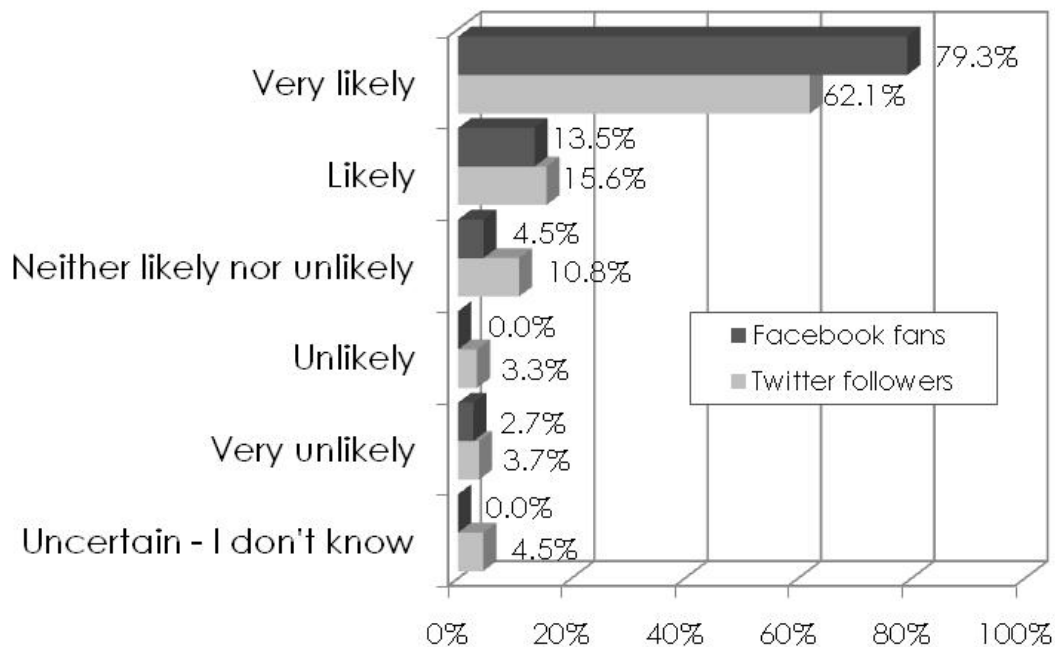
**FIGURE 2.4—TOOK A LOUISIANA TRIP IN PAST 12 MONTHS**



**FIGURE NOTES** – Percent of survey respondents visiting Louisiana in past 12 months. Source: Louisiana Travel Facebook and Twitter user surveys.

A significant proportion of Louisiana Travel’s social media audience is also likely to travel within the state in the near future. Nearly 80 percent of Facebook fans said they were “Very likely” to travel within Louisiana in the coming year, with another 13.5 percent saying they were “Likely.” Over 60 percent of Twitter followers reported being “Very likely” to take a Louisiana trip in the next twelve months, with another 15.6 percent “Likely” (Figure 2.5, below).

**FIGURE 2.5—LIKELIHOOD OF TRAVEL WITHIN LOUISIANA IN THE NEXT 12 MONTHS**



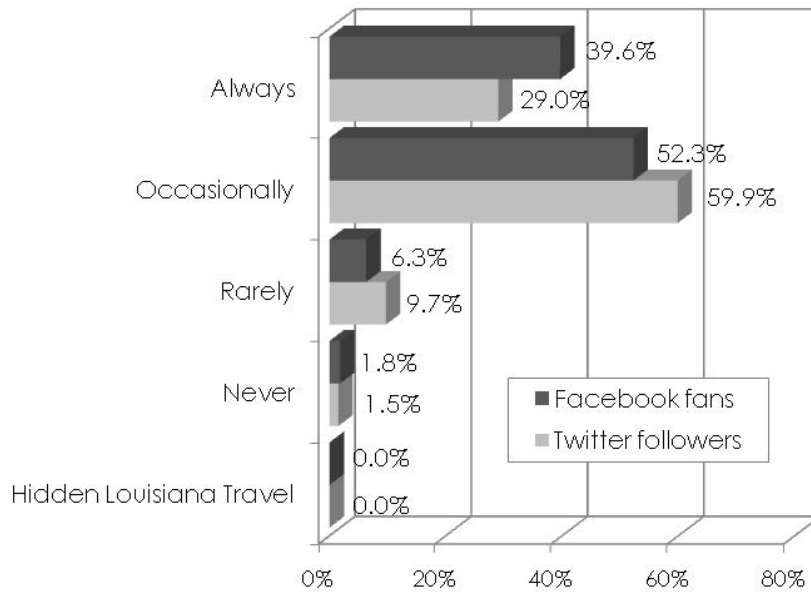
**FIGURE NOTES** – Likelihood of visiting Louisiana in next 12 months. Source: Louisiana Travel Facebook and Twitter user surveys.

## Both Audiences Engage with Louisiana’s Content

About 90 percent of both Louisiana Travel Facebook fans and Twitter followers at least “Occasionally,” if not “Always,” read Louisiana’s posts or tweets, demonstrating these groups’ more active, rather than passive, interest in Louisiana travel (Figure 2.6, below). Indeed, the qualitative research conducted for this project suggests that for a number of persons, engaging with Louisiana in this media is driven by a desire to keep up with

what is going on in the state (and a fear of “missing something”).

**FIGURE 2.6—FREQUENCY OF READING LOUISIANA TRAVEL CONTENT (POSTS/TWEETS)**



**FIGURE NOTES** – Frequency of reading Louisiana’s social media content. Source: Louisiana Travel Facebook and Twitter user surveys.

## Louisiana’s Social Media Audience are Newbies

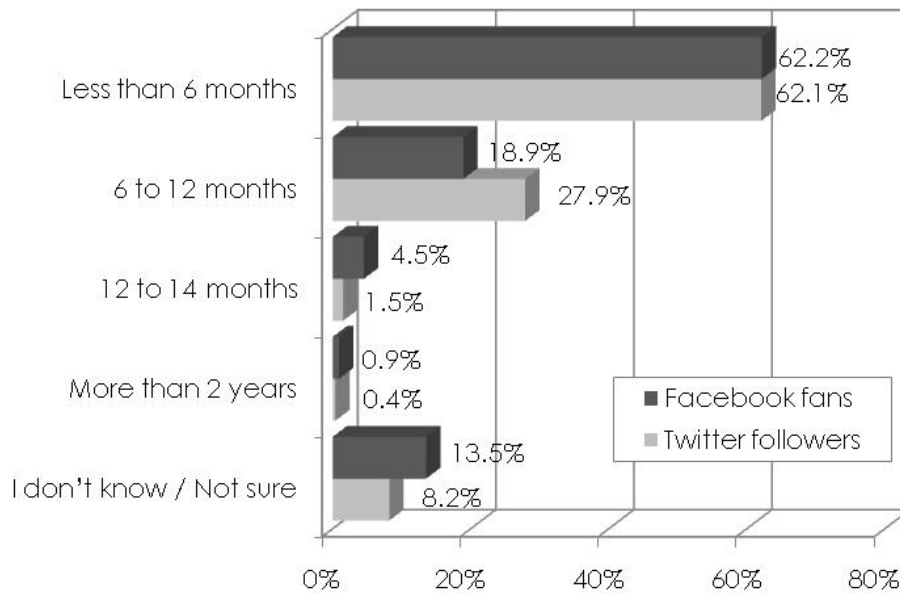
Nearly two-thirds of both Louisiana Travel’s Facebook fans and Twitter followers have been following Louisiana Travel for less than six months (Figure 2.7, following). Few state they have been connected to Louisiana Travel for a year or more.

Based on the experiences of those who participated in the project’s in-depth interviews, this may be in some part due to many of the audience being relatively new to Twitter and/or Facebook overall. In addition, with, for example, Facebook usage largely motivated by keeping in touch with friends and family, the idea to use this application for travel related purposes may be novel. Additionally, respondents may not have a clear recall of when they made this connection to Louisiana.

As more fans and followers are added and time strengthens the relationship

with this audience—as well as provides the opportunity for these travelers to be motivated by, plan and take a trip based on content seen through this media—there is significant potential for the state to further realize economic impact from their marketing efforts through these two applications.

**FIGURE 2.7—LENGTH OF TIME USER HAS FOLLOWED/BEEN A FAN OF LOUISIANA TRAVEL**



**FIGURE NOTES** – Length of time following Louisiana’s social media content. Source: Louisiana Travel Facebook and Twitter user surveys.

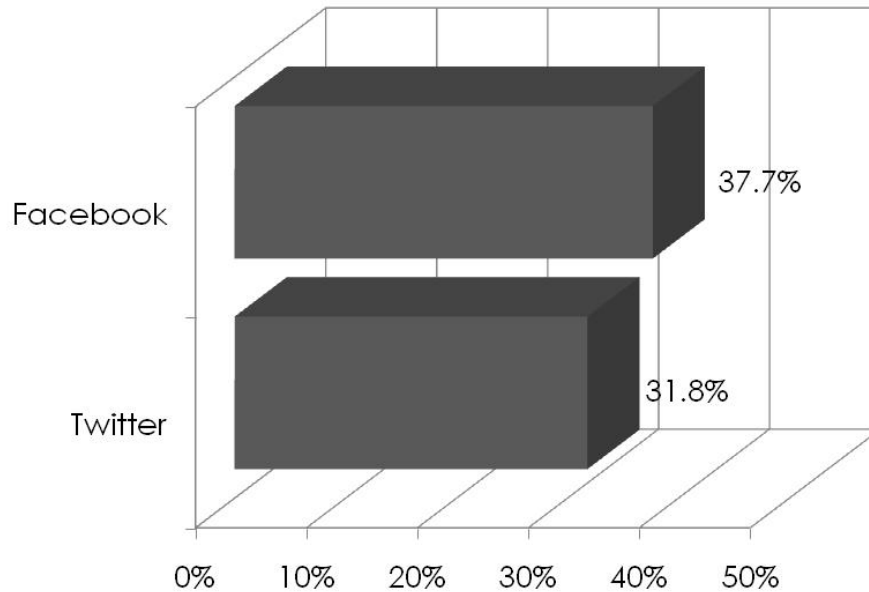
## Louisiana’s Social Media Content is Generating Visitation

While the program is still in its infancy, the Louisiana Office of Tourism has generated incremental travel to the state through its social media efforts. An important proportion of the Louisiana trips taken by survey respondents were motivated in some part by content consumed through one of these channels. About two-thirds of both Facebook fans and Twitter followers who traveled in Louisiana reported that Louisiana Travel’s content had impacted their decision to ultimately visit the state (Figure 2.8, following).

This finding aligns with another discussed later in the report, which is that this audience generally finds Louisiana Travel’s social media content

interesting—and thus, perhaps, more likely to inspire trips to the state.

**FIGURE 2.8—SOCIAL MEDIA CONTENT INFLUENCED DECISION TO TAKE A LOUISIANA TRIP**



**FIGURE NOTES** – Report a Louisiana trip was influenced by the state’s social media content. Source: Louisiana Travel Facebook and Twitter user surveys.

## Louisiana’s Social Media Travelers are Big Travel Spenders

Louisiana appears to be reaching an enviable travel audience—those who will spend relatively large amounts of money on their trip. The Louisiana Travel Facebook fans and Twitter followers that traveled to Louisiana in the past 12 months were asked to report their per-day spending on various trip related items (Figure 2.9, following). The average Facebook fan traveling in Louisiana spent \$270.30 per day on their trip, while the average Louisiana Travel Twitter follower spent a similar \$280.40 per day. Given this level of trip spending, inspiring Louisiana’s Facebook and Twitter audiences to travel in Louisiana through social media content looks to provide generous economic benefit to tourism related businesses in the state.

FIGURE 2.9—TRIP SPENDING IN LOUISIANA PER DAY

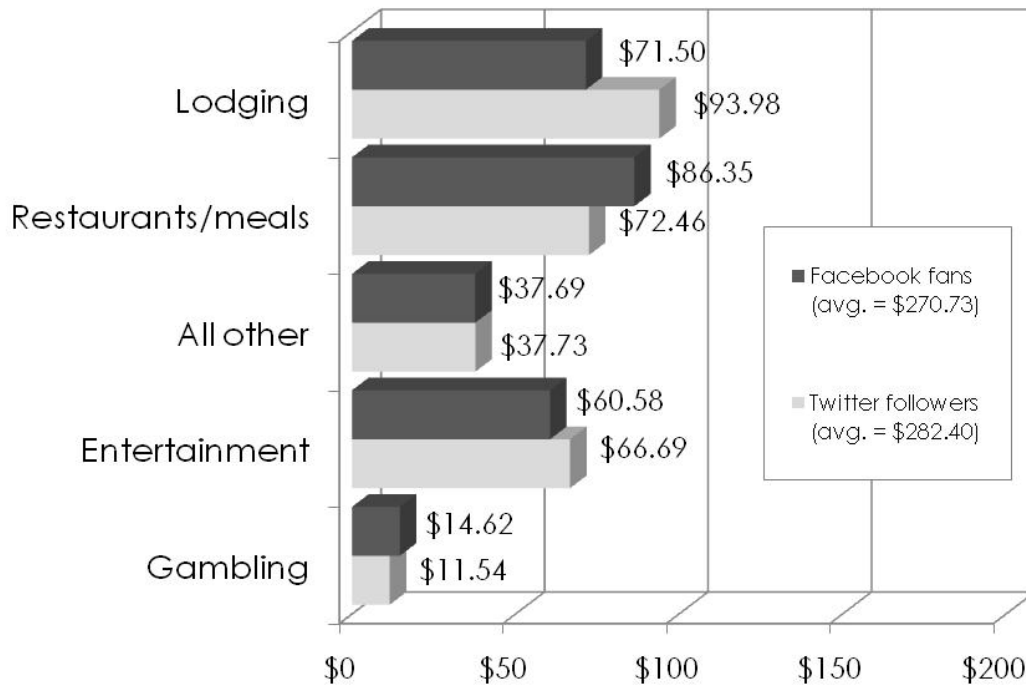


FIGURE NOTES – Mean reported spending in Louisiana. Source: Louisiana Travel Facebook and Twitter user surveys.

## Louisiana Travel’s Audiences are Also Listening to Competitive Destinations

While the state’s social media audience is engaged with Louisiana Travel, they are also receiving competing messages from other destinations. As illustrated in Figure 2.10, 53.2 percent of Louisiana Travel Facebook fans and 71.7 percent of Louisiana Travel Twitter followers have connected with other destinations through these mediums. As use of Facebook and Twitter for travel-related purposes continues to grow (making the environment more competitive for DMOs), it will become even more imperative that Louisiana Travel maintains a compelling presence in these mediums through appealing and useful content.



FIGURE 2.10—FOLLOWS OTHER TRAVEL DESTINATIONS IN SOCIAL MEDIA

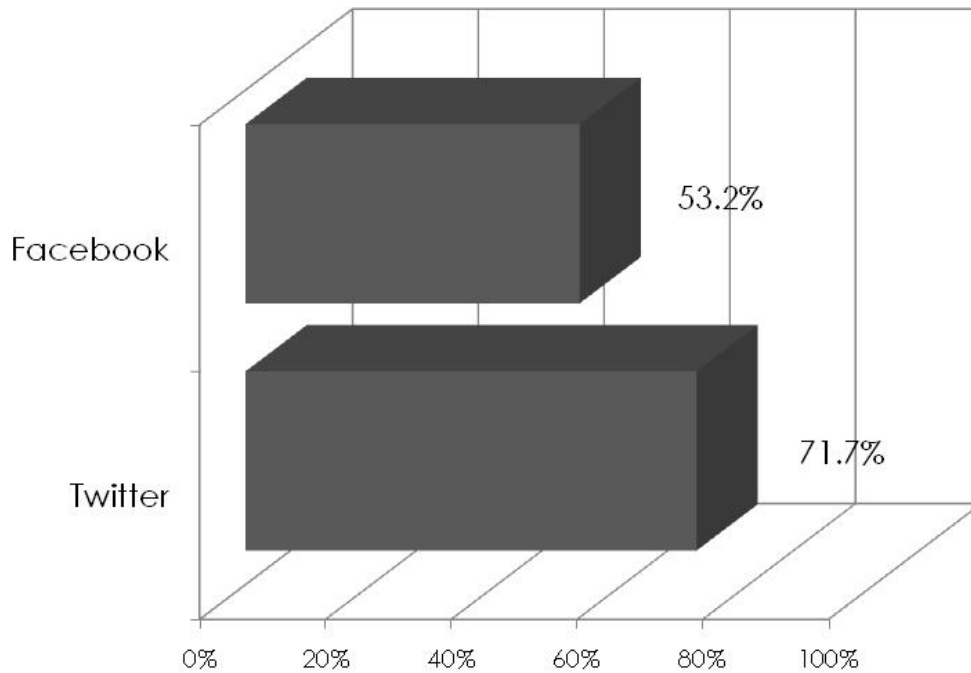
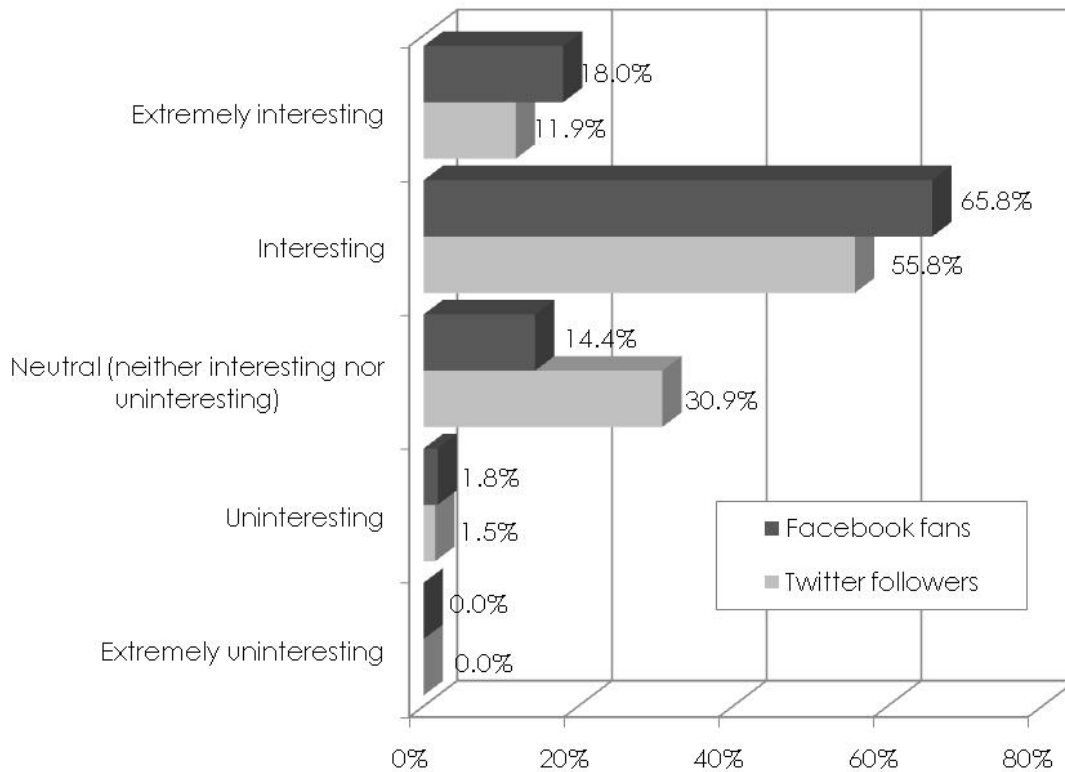


FIGURE NOTES – Percent following other destinations' social media content. Source: Louisiana Travel Facebook and Twitter user surveys.

## Louisiana's Social Media Content Interests its Readership

Despite the competitive landscape, the significant majority of Louisiana's social media audience currently finds the content Louisiana Travel posts through this media "Interesting" or "Extremely interesting" (Figure 2.11 following). Notably, Twitter followers were twice as likely as Facebook fans to be neutral in their rating of Louisiana Travel's content. The discussion that emerged in the in-depth interviews provides some insight into this. Those that use both Facebook and Twitter agreed that Facebook's platform simply allows for a more interesting presentation of content than Twitter.

**FIGURE 2.11—RATING OF HOW INTERESTING LOUISIANA TRAVEL'S CONTENT IS**



**FIGURE NOTES** – Percent survey respondents rating Louisiana’s social media content at each level of interest. Source: Louisiana Travel Facebook and Twitter user surveys.

## Re-Posting or Re-Tweeting is Limited

As fans/followers re-posting or re-tweeting content can exponentially increase Louisiana Travel’s messaging reach and thus generate more fans/followers, it is in the Office of Tourism’s best interest to motivate its fans/followers to do so. Similar proportions of Facebook fans and Twitter followers—about one in five—reported that they have actually re-posted or re-tweeted content from Louisiana Travel.

FIGURE 2.12—RE-POSTED OR RE-TWEETED LOUISIANA TRAVEL CONTENT

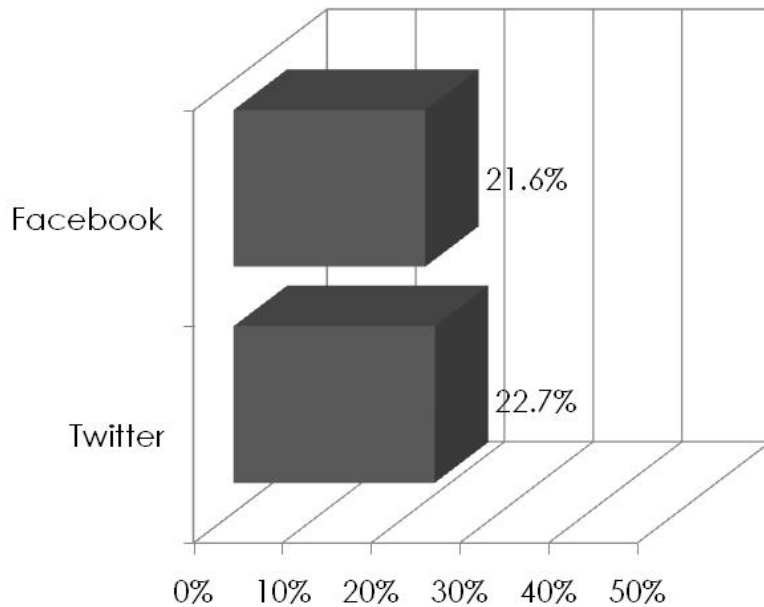


FIGURE 3.10 – Percent of survey respondents who have re-tweeted Louisiana content. Source: Louisiana Travel Facebook and Twitter user surveys.

Again, the qualitative research conducted for this project provides further insight to this finding. While some fans/followers interviewed are highly active in social media and driven by a feeling of community that is developed by re-tweeting or re-posting content, many of those interviewed categorized themselves as social media “watchers”/consumers—using Facebook and/or Twitter as information sources rather than being contributors themselves. In fact, the majority of Twitter followers interviewed reported rarely sending out their own tweets. When asked what would prompt them to re-tweet or re-post content, they agreed that it would have to be something very compelling. It is likely the most active users who will be depended on for furthering Louisiana Travel’s reach through re-posts/re-tweets.

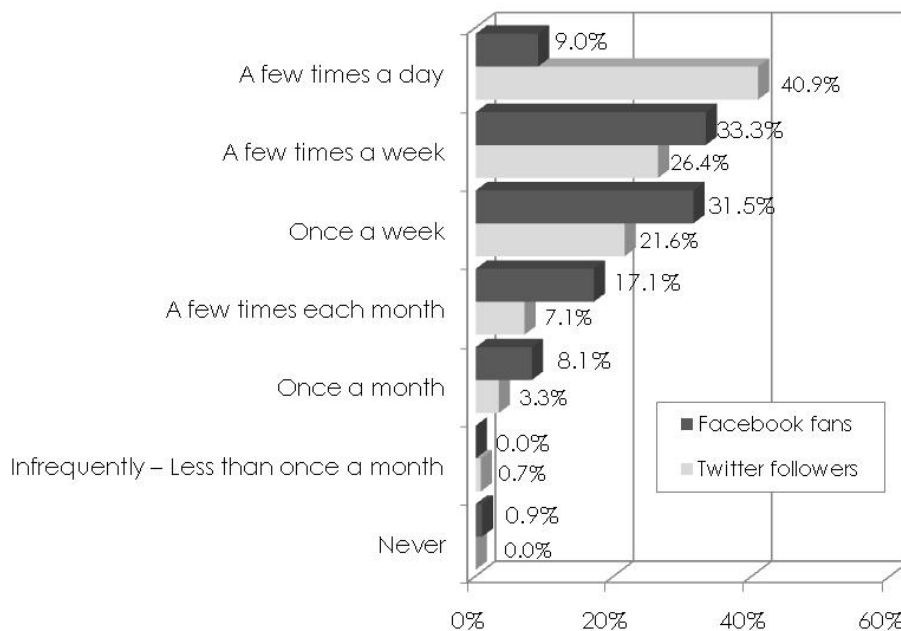
### Twitter Followers Want Frequent Contact

Survey respondents were asked their preference about how often Louisiana Travel should transmit content in social media. As illustrated in Figure 2.13

(following), no single posting frequency was overwhelmingly preferred. Nevertheless, the strong majority of both Twitter followers and Facebook fans want to hear from Louisiana Travel once a week or more (88.8% and 73.9% respectively). As aforementioned, many of those who participated in the in-depth interviews are fans of or follow Louisiana Travel to keep abreast of what is going on in the state, and there was a strong sentiment that Louisiana “always has something going on.” Communicating regularly with these reinforces this sense of the Louisiana travel brand and furthers their trust that Louisiana Travel is a reliable resource for information about the state.

Twitter followers are four times more likely than Facebook fans to prefer that Louisiana Travel send out messages “A few times a day.” Twitter users’ response may be driven by the mass amount of information that moves through this medium, and consequently the speed at which content is rotated. Sending out messages often appears to fit well with this platform.

**FIGURE 2.13—PREFERRED FREQUENCY OF LOUISIANA POSTS/TWEETS**

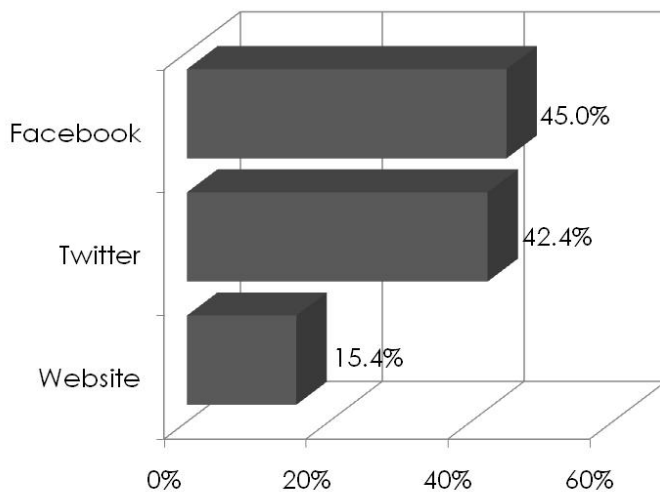


**FIGURE NOTES** – Frequency of desired contact by Louisiana via social media. Source: Louisiana Travel Facebook and Twitter user surveys.

## Louisiana’s Social Media & Website Audiences are Quite Different

The Louisiana Office of Tourism’s Web site attracts a high proportion of out-of-state visitors, who represent opportunity for this promotional vehicle to generate incremental economic impact to the state. Figure 2.14 (below) illustrates that the state’s social media users are much more likely to be Louisiana residents than are website visitors. Over 80 percent of the website audience is from outside Louisiana, while about half of the Facebook and Twitter audiences reside in other states. This has clear implications for the types of content that may be appropriate for these audiences.

FIGURE 2.14—LOUISIANA RESIDENCE



**FIGURE NOTES** – Percent of survey respondents residing in Louisiana. Source: Louisiana Travel Facebook, Twitter and website user surveys.

Nevertheless, the proportion of Louisiana’s social media audience from outside the state is significant, and this audience indeed presents economic opportunity (Section 4: Return on Investment Estimation, following). Importantly, as many participants in the qualitative research discussed, having local residents participate in Louisiana’s social media communities is critical to engaging those from out of state. These would-be Louisiana travelers report being motivated to use the state’s offerings in social media by a desire for “insider information” from local residents who know the state best. Thus, an active local audience may contribute greatly to the ultimate

impact the state’s social media promotions have on generating incremental travel.

## Website Users Show Potential as a base for Building Social Media Audiences

The survey of Louisiana Travel’s website visitors asked respondents which social media they have used in the past 12 months. Facebook usage far outpaces Twitter. While one in ten website users had used Twitter in the past year, over half had used Facebook.

FIGURE 2.15—SOCIAL MEDIA USED

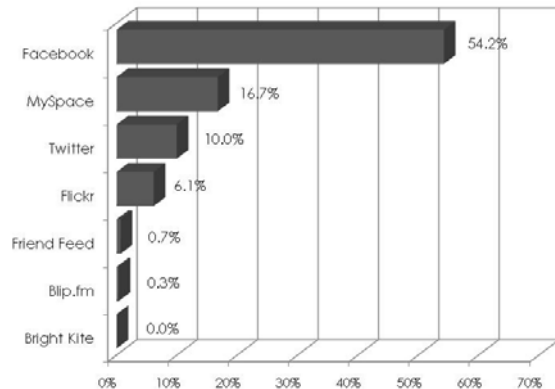


FIGURE NOTES – Percent of respondents using each social media. Source: Louisiana Travel website user survey.

Website visitors were asked to rate their interest in becoming Louisiana Travel on Facebook and following Louisiana Travel on Twitter (Figures 2.16 and 2.17). About one in five said they were “Interested” or “Extremely interested” in becoming Louisiana Travel’s Facebook fan. Given that only 10.0 percent of website visitors use Twitter, interest is less (6.3%).

FIGURE 2.16—INTEREST IN BECOMING A FAN OF LOUISIANA TRAVEL ON FACEBOOK

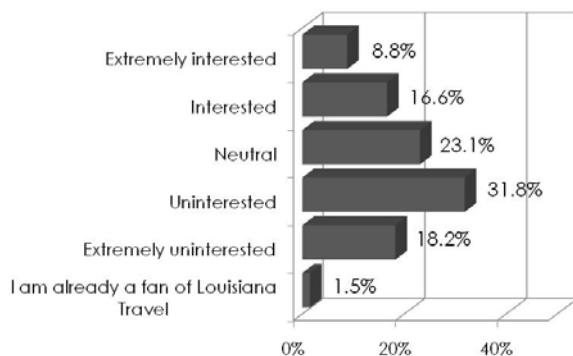


FIGURE NOTES – Percent of respondents interested in becoming a fan of Louisiana Travel on Facebook. Source: Louisiana Travel website user survey.

FIGURE 2.17—INTEREST IN FOLLOWING LOUISIANA TRAVEL ON TWITTER

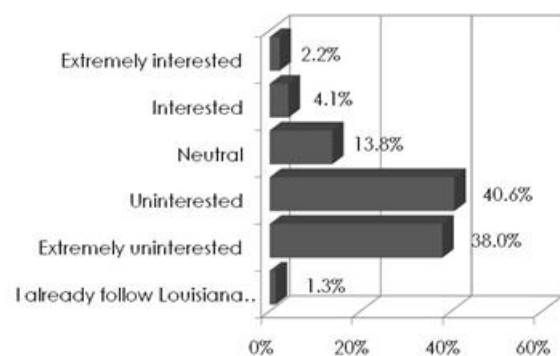


FIGURE NOTES – Percent of respondents interested in following Louisiana Travel on Twitter. Source: Louisiana Travel website user survey.

## Guidelines for Social Media Best Practices

An important goal of this project was to develop a set of best practices guidelines for Louisiana’s marketers using Facebook and Twitter to promote their destination. We believe that both the quantitative and qualitative efforts of this study yielded important findings which can serve as direction for those wanting to effectively sell their destinations via social media. The guidelines that follow were developed based on Destination Analysts’ evaluation of all data collected in this project. While these guidelines are outlined for Twitter and Facebook individually, this section begins with a discussion of the environment of each of these social media marketing tools. We believe an understanding of how users perceive these environments is crucial to developing an effective communications strategy.

### The Twitter & Facebook User Environments

Twitter and Facebook present fundamentally different user experiences. Understanding these differences is critical to maximizing the effectiveness of a destination’s social media marketing efforts. In a sense, a user watching her Twitter feeds will likely be in a very different mindset than if she is using Facebook. We believe that, based on the qualitative research conducted for this project, that these user mindsets can be described as follows:

**Twitter** is best described as a near voyeuristic experience, which draws a user into watching a stream of content that quickly passes. Tweet posts appear and disappear rapidly and users generally do not report using their Twitter interface to research or look backwards. In its essence, Twitter is a rapidly changing visual experience that allows the user to keep tabs on what’s going on in their

different realms of interest. Twitter is particularly appealing for those who are—either in general or about certain topics—fearful of missing out on something they deem important, want to know things first and want information delivered quickly and efficiently.

**Facebook** is seen as being a generally more engaging way of communicating with friends and organizations. The essence of the Facebook experience is participating in a conversation, even if passively. Users of both tools, generally agree that Facebook is a better environment for communicating all types of information. A destination’s Facebook wall is seen much more like a traditional website or blog, with content added by its readers as an ongoing conversation.

Users of both Twitter and Facebook are highly engaged in their online lives, spending many hours per day online. But, all this time is not equal and they may slip between different mindsets when experiencing different online content. We believe that the perspective outlined must be understood and taken into account when developing a communications strategy that will work effectively in each environment.

## **General Findings**

A few general findings emerging from the user interviews will set the stage for these best practice rules. These are findings that apply to both Twitter and Facebook.

- **Both Twitter and Facebook users tend to follow multiple organizations.** However, Twitter users follow more organizations than do Facebook users. This is a natural out-growth of the aforementioned differences in the social media environments. To have a stimulating Twitter environment, users require more content providers to be continually adding feeds to their personal data streams. This finding was supported by data collected in the user surveys, where 71.7 percent of Louisiana’s Twitter followers said they follow a destination other than Louisiana, while only about half (53.2%) of the state’s Facebook fans followed another destination.
- **Users are explicitly open to having social media content effect their destination selection process.** While most interviewees were not aware



of any instances when they visited a destination as a result of content seen on Twitter or Facebook, they reported a desire to have this happen. Why would one follow Louisiana's posts and tweets if one weren't interested in traveling within the state? The consensus among interviewees was that they could absolutely see themselves traveling as a result of Louisiana's posts and tweets.

- **Little enthusiasm was expressed for re-tweeting or re-posting destination travel content.** We expect that the vast majority of incremental travel generated by Louisiana's social media efforts will come directly from its follower/fan base, and not from others viewing re-posts or re-tweets.
- **People follow Louisiana Travel for many reasons.** A series of questions in the interviews probed into the reasons Louisiana fans and followers had for signing up for and continuing to maintain a relationship with the state's social media content. While individual answers varied, it was clear that these persons' motivations for maintaining contact with Louisiana Travel were many. The most important reasons included an interest in new ideas for travel to the state, business reasons and nostalgia.
- **Users of Twitter and Facebook want Louisiana to post a wide variety of content. This content should always be relevant to travel planning.** The two most desired types of information are "things to see and do" and "travel discounts." Travel packages were commonly seen as the most interesting type of discount, but having an air component to these packages generated less enthusiasm. The state's marketing team would be wise to remember that many readers are state residents or live in nearby states, and the majority of leisure travel is, of course, done by car.
- **As trust depends on the content's source, the state should maintain a consistently credible voice (and overall environment) in its social media marketing.** Users of social media are concerned about the credibility of posts and content generated in Facebook and Twitter. Even so, the interviewees participating in this project were widely confident that they could sort out credible information sources from those they could not immediately trust. It seemed almost as if this was a non-issue among the

group who, when asked about how much they trusted information posted on social media sites, universally answered that it simply depended on the source. It was clear from this research that not only should the state's own content be credible, it should only explicitly link to trustworthy external sources, and work to maintain an environment where fans/followers post reliable and relevant content and comments.

- **In terms of the proper administrator of a Twitter or Facebook account, interviewees generally favored using an organization's formal identity to other options such as a person working for the organization.** This sentiment was not universal, but there was a concern expressed that it was important to easily recognize who was responsible for the content. There are practical advantages as well. Representing the organization as the official state tourism office versus an individual lends to credibility and trustworthiness about the content. It also makes it more likely that the organization will show up in search results (which is how a number of those interviewed initially found Louisiana Travel).
- **Users of Twitter and especially Facebook desire rich, relevant content, and welcome links to external content.** It should be clear from the link, however, what the external content is and its source, and it must be interesting and relevant. Interviewees expressed a dislike of posts/links to seemingly random, "boring" or irrelevant content. We strongly recommend taking a when-in-doubt-don't-post approach. This means, when a piece of content does not fit nicely into the state's communications strategy, and frankly might be under consideration simply to fill a perceived void or to satisfy the person interests of the administrator, err on the side of not posting the content. This is especially relevant for Facebook content where there is somewhat less tolerance for the immaterial.
- **Interest in customization of social media marketing communications is high.** While users were not sure how this could be done, they were very interested in having the state's posts and tweets customized to their interests. This was easier to envision on Facebook, as the various applications comprising the tool—such as the tab options—allow for

more specific categorization of information and discerning access to that information.

### Twitter-specific Best Practice Guidelines

- **Post regularly.** This was confirmed in the study's quantitative research, but in interviews Twitter users showed a strong interest in hearing from Louisiana several times a day via Twitter.
- **Twitter content must be exciting, different, interesting, timely and relevant.** Remember that Twitter is a voyeuristic experience, with users watching a steadily flowing stream of tweets that pass rapidly by. Interviewees report that conversations in Twitter are difficult to follow, and they rarely look backwards. In this environment more than Facebook, messages must stand out to be noticed. Focus on surprising, unexpected, offbeat or new ideas.
- **Twitter is primarily used to keep tabs on what's going on in the destination, so this should be top of mind in developing a communications strategy.** Content tweeted by the state should have a heavy focus on upcoming events, festivals and other interesting, but timely, happenings in the state.
- **Tweets should be about things happening far enough in advance to plan a leisure trip.** Interviewees objected to posts about current or past events, desiring instead to have the feed of content focus on things they would have time to plan a trip to enjoy.
- **Build connection, but don't just ask questions.** In the interviews participants were asked to review the Twitter feeds of several other destination marketing organizations. The most widely criticized technique used by these groups was simply asking questions. This type of content was soundly rejected, and if we remember that interviewees felt having conversations via Twitter was hard, we can easily see why. Threads and conversations are easy on Facebook, not on Twitter.

- **Use Twitter to speak to your business audiences.** Twitter users are much more likely to be using the tool for business purposes than Facebook users. In fact, a census of Louisiana Travel's Twitter followers showed that nearly 90 percent of followers were using a corporate or business identity. Many of these were travel industry businesses. Consider adding to your Twitter communications plan content that can be repurposed by travel agents and others in the industry.
- **Don't neglect page design considerations.** Interviewees expressed a surprising degree of concern about the visual elements of images and backgrounds used by destinations tested in this study. It might be easy to suppose that these don't matter, but that would be a mistake.
- **Reply to followers via Twitter, but don't shy away from private messages in an attempt to create a public conversation.** Destination marketers should understand the limited usefulness of Twitter as a conversational tool, as content passes by the user so quickly.
- **Make links to external content clear.** Strong disdain was expressed for Twitter links that did not clearly describe the content the user would get by clicking. Always mention if external content opens video or sound files, as such surprises may irritate users.

### Facebook-specific Best Practices

- **Post so that fans actively feel connected, but use caution in posting too frequently. Post on a daily basis at most.** This study's quantitative findings support the opinion expressed by most interviewees that they are sensitive to over-posting of content via Facebook. Remember that your fans have chosen to follow you for a reason, but the main reason they use Facebook is to keep in touch with their friends and relatives. Don't be a spammer in this environment.
- **When posting new content, focus on activities, events and discounts, but have lots of relevant variety.** As was the case with Twitter, Facebook users want variety, but still look to the state's Facebook content as a

source for travel inspiration. Inspire them with new, exciting, unusual and fun ideas for things to see and do in the state.

- **A destination's Facebook presence will be primarily used as a source of travel inspiration, but should also be a robust trip planning tool.** A Facebook presence can and should be a travel planning tool, with plenty of content on multiple tabs provided by the administrator and users. This content should link to valuable external sources, but in itself should be a robust travel planning tool.
- **Think beyond the wall.** Be creative with the tabs you use for your Facebook content. Users will access this content, not limiting themselves to the main wall. Images, reviews, sweepstakes and discussions are popular destination tab categories.
- **Regular upkeep of a destination's Facebook pages & discussions is crucial.** The interviews confirmed that Facebook walls that seem neglected will be deemed unreliable and will likely not be used. Reasonably frequent posts, timely answer to questions from fans, and content in keeping with travel planning horizons should be a top priority for the destination.
- **Customization of a destination's content via multiple topic-specific pages is a popular idea.** As was discussed earlier, customization of Facebook content was welcomed by Louisiana's fans. Using multiple pages for different travel segments would work well to satisfy this desire.
- **Fans enjoy discussions on your Facebook wall.** Administrator replies on a Facebook wall to individual fans as a way to enhance such conversations are much easier to follow than responses on Twitter. Users report that they would welcome such content. Unless specifically requested, keep private messages to a minimum.
- **Be sure to have other ways to contact the destination, such as telephone numbers, links to your website, links to visitor guide order forms, etc.**

- **Be official for trust's sake.** As was the case with Twitter and for the same reasons, a general preference appears to exist for a destination's administrator to be the official marketing organization.
- **Keep personal interest posts to a minimum.** Again, destinations would be wise to develop a communications strategy, even possibly a checklist of tests a post must pass before going up on the wall, and use it religiously. Random, unfocused or irrelevant content will be a turn off to your fans.
- **Unique content is highly desired.** Interviewees reported a very high degree of interest in posts on Facebook about new or unique activities and things to do in Louisiana. Generic or well-known events and activities will generate relatively limited fan interest.

## Return on Investment Estimation

Return on Investment for a destination marketing program can be defined as the total amount of direct visitor spending in the destination that is generated by the program. Alternatively, a DMO marketing program's ROI can be defined as the amount of visitor spending in the destination that would not have occurred in the absence of the program. In short, we seek to estimate how much a marketing program brings back to the destination in direct visitor spending per dollar spent developing and maintaining a given marketing program.

For this research, we examined the return on investment of the State of Louisiana's social media marketing efforts, specifically its presences on Facebook and Twitter. In this section, we estimate the amount of direct visitor spending in Louisiana that happened as a direct result of the State's Facebook posts and tweets on Twitter. Or, using the paradigm described above, how much visitor spending happened in the State that would not have occurred in the absence of these Facebook and Twitter marketing efforts.

This is in many ways a first-of-its-kind research project, and it should be noted that Louisiana's social media marketing efforts are relatively new. Its base of followers on Facebook and Twitter is relatively small, but growing daily. These early ROI estimated covers spending by the State's first 320 Facebook followers and 2,299 Twitter followers during roughly the first eleven months of 2009. While the State's fan/follower base has grown substantially since this research was fielded, we cannot definitively estimate ROI resulting from new fans/followers or that may have happened after November 2009. Still, we believe that the strongly positive ROI metrics resulting from this study present a

solid case for continuing Louisiana's social media marketing efforts.

### **About Social Media Marketing**

The approach used here to estimate the return on investment of Louisiana's social media marketing efforts is similar to conversion studies that have long been used to estimate the effectiveness of DMO marketing programs. This is because, in many ways, social media marketing is no different than other marketing tools used by DMOs. Consider, for example, a DMO e-mail marketing campaign. Typically, e-mail promotions push out marketing messages to a group of potential travelers who have opted-in to receive these messages. Through these messages, readers have the opportunity to explore links for additional information if a topic is of interest. These e-mail campaigns can drive incremental travel to a destination and build its brand. In their essence, e-mail campaigns are similar to social media marketing, which also pushes marketing messages via the Facebook/Twitter interface to persons who have opted-in (by following or becoming a fan of the DMO.)

One key difference between social media marketing and e-mail marketing techniques is contact frequency. While good DMO marketers understand that frequent e-mail blasts sent to their lists are typically not welcome, the story is different for social media marketing. As was shown earlier in this report, fans and followers of Louisiana's social media marketing efforts express relatively frequent posts and tweets from the State.

In the course of this study, we found that contacting fans/followers through these online interfaces for survey purposes is considerably more difficult and less effective than through a simple e-mail blast. Placing repeated survey invitations on Louisiana's Facebook wall or in Tweets yielded extremely low response rates (5-8%). In our company's experience, an e-mail survey invitation sent to a well-maintained DMO list can easily yield a 20-35% response rate. For both Facebook and Twitter it was necessary to send private messages to all fans/followers requesting help with the survey to obtain similar overall response rates.

This might suggest a lower, or at least different, level of engagement for these social media interfaces (compared to e-mail promotions.) While this poses a significant challenge for the researcher, it will be shown that in the case of



Louisiana these social media tools worked well as a tool for generating incremental travel to the State, and consequently providing a positive return on investment for the State of Louisiana.

### **How ROI is Calculated**

Program ROI is calculated in this study as follows:

The ROI (or direct visitor spending estimates) of Louisiana’s social media marketing efforts include all direct spending in Louisiana by two types of visitors—those who either took “incremental trips” to The State of Louisiana or those who extended the length a already-planned trip to Louisiana based on information received through Louisiana’s Facebook or Twitter efforts:

1. Visitors on *incremental trips* are persons living outside the State of Louisiana who took a leisure trip as a direct result of information received through either social media marketing interface. Identifying whether a fan/follower was so influenced to visit Louisiana is based on their responses to two survey questions. In their survey answers, the respondent had to answer that information received through Louisiana’s Facebook/Twitter feeds “helped them to make their decision to visit” and that this information was either “Important” or “Very important” to their decision to visit. All reported spending by leisure travelers who took such trips is included in the direct spending generated by incremental trips to Louisiana.
2. Fans/followers who *extended their stay in Louisiana* due to Louisiana’s social media marketing can be leisure travelers, business travelers and conventioners. These travelers who visited Louisiana but stated that the state’s social media marketing efforts did not influence their decision to visit Louisiana were asked a series of questions on the influence of Louisiana’s social media content on the length of their stay in Louisiana. Direct visitor spending estimates for this group only include spending during reported “additional” days in market that resulted from Louisiana’s Facebook posts or tweets on Twitter.

Using these definitions, the study's key ROI findings are summarized below.

- **Incremental trips to Louisiana generated by social media marketing:** An estimated 16 incremental trips were generated for the State of Louisiana by Facebook and another 62 by Twitter. As discussed above, these are trips to Louisiana that would not have happened if these social media marketing efforts were not undertaken, and thus any visitor spending in Louisiana on these trips can be counted as part of the program's economic impact to the state. For Facebook fans, the average incremental trip lasted 4.8 days, with a reported in-market spending of \$360.80 per day. For Twitter followers, these figures were 4.2 days at \$279.75 per day.
- **Additional days spent in Louisiana generated by social media marketing:** A second way the state's social media marketing could potentially generate economic value for the state of Louisiana is by convincing visitors to extend their already-planned stays in Louisiana. The research showed no measurable effect on visitors' length of stay in the state, hence, no economic value was generated.
- **Total direct visitor spending in Louisiana generated by social media marketing:** The two components discussed above (spending on incremental trips and additional days in market) comprise the program's economic impact as defined in this study. It is estimated that incremental trips would therefore have resulted in \$27,485 (Facebook) and \$71,946 (Twitter) in new visitor spending in Louisiana, or approximately \$85.81 (Facebook) and \$31.29 (Twitter) in direct visitor spending in Louisiana per fan/follower<sup>2</sup>.

The table on the next page details the steps used in these calculations.

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<sup>2</sup> The model used here to estimate total direct visitor spending in Louisiana generated by these social mediums only includes spending by the Facebook fan or Twitter follower. Additional spending by others who may have accompanied the fan/follower on his/her Louisiana trip is purposefully excluded. This conservative step is taken as the travel motivations of others in the fan's/follower's travel party cannot be known.

## Louisiana Social Media Marketing ROI Calculation

(Steps in Calculation of Total Program ROI)

Line #		Facebook	Twitter
A	Total Fans/Followers	320	2,299
B	% of fans/followers living outside Louisiana	55.0%	57.6%
C	Fans/followers potentially influenced to visit (A * B)	176	1324
D	% visiting Louisiana after becoming fan/follower	47.5%	36.1%
E	Total fans/followers visiting Louisiana (C * D)	84	478
F	Average leisure visits after becoming fan/follower	1.2	1.2
G	Total visits to Louisiana (after becoming Fan/Follower)	100	566
<b>Direct visitor spending on incremental trips to Louisiana</b>			
H	Percent of trips influenced to visit by social media marketing	37.9%	34.7%
I	Percent of influenced trips with significant importance*	41.7%	31.3%
J	Trips to Louisiana influenced by social media (E * H * I)	16	62
K	Average length of stay in Louisiana	4.8	4.2
L	Total visitor days in Louisiana on influenced trips (J * K)	76	257
M	Average reported visitor spending per-day in Louisiana	\$360.80	\$279.75
N	<b>Direct visitor spending on incremental trips to Louisiana (L * M)</b>	<b>\$27,458</b>	<b>\$71,946</b>
<b>Direct Visitor Spending on lengthened trips</b>			
O	Potential trips lengthened by social media marketing (G * 1-H)	62	370
P	Percent lengthening trip due to social media marketing program	3.3%	0.0%
Q	Number of trips lengthened (O * P)	2.06	0.00
R	Average number of days trip was lengthened	0.00	0.00
S	Total number of incremental visitor days spent in Louisiana (Q * R)	0.00	0.00
T	Average spending per-day in Louisiana	\$0.00	\$0.00
U	<b>Visitor spending on lengthened trips (S * T)</b>	<b>\$0.00</b>	<b>\$0.00</b>
V	<b>TOTAL INCREMENTAL VISITOR SPENDING IN LOUISIANA (N + U)</b>	<b>\$27,458</b>	<b>\$71,946</b>
W	<b>TOTAL INCREMENTAL VISITOR SPENDING PER FAN/FOLLOWER</b>	<b>\$85.81</b>	<b>\$31.29</b>

\* "Very important," "Important" or "Somewhat important" to their decision to visit Louisiana.

## Louisiana's Program Investment

With direct visitor spending of \$27,485 from Facebook and \$71,946 from Twitter, we estimate a total impact for the program on \$99,404. During the period of study, the Louisiana Office of Tourism is estimated to have spent \$20,000 all-inclusive on these efforts. This leaves us with an estimated program return on investment ratio of 4.97 to 1.