Internet promotional material and conservation volunteer tourist motivations: A case study of selecting organizations and projects ☆

Kerry E. Grimm [a,*], Mark D. Needham [b,1]

[a] Environmental Sciences, 104 Wilkinson Hall, Oregon State University, Corvallis, OR 97331, USA
[b] Department of Forest Ecosystems and Society, 321 Richardson Hall, Oregon State University, Corvallis, OR, USA

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ABSTRACT

Although much research has discussed why tourists volunteer abroad, little work has explored the role of promotional material (e.g., internet websites) in volunteer decisions. We examined if promotional material played a motivating role in volunteer tourists' decision to select specific organizations or conservation projects, and if so, what in the material influenced their choices. We also identified types of promotional material used and how volunteers accessed this information. To collect data, we engaged in participant observation and conducted interviews at a conservation volunteer project in Ecuador with 36 volunteer tourists, 2 managers, and 3 volunteer coordinators. Findings revealed that volunteers almost exclusively used the internet to search for volunteer tourism opportunities. Volunteer decisions to select the organization or project were influenced by both website appearance (e.g., organized, professional) and specific content (e.g., photographs, volunteer comments, project descriptions, buzzwords). We discuss implications for managers and organizations, tourism theory, and future research.

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1. Introduction

The number of people traveling to other countries to volunteer for conservation or humanitarian projects has increased substantially in the past three decades (Brown & Morrison, 2003). These tourists "volunteer in an organized way to undertake holidays that might involve aiding or alleviating the material poverty of some groups in society, the restoration of certain environments, or research into aspects of society or environment" (Wearing, 2001, p. 1). Some volunteers apply to intermediary organizations (e.g., i-to-i) or non-governmental organizations (NGOs), whereas others contact project sites directly.

With the growth of volunteer tourism, research on the subject has also increased. Popular topics of study include motivations (e.g., Broad, 2003; Brown & Lehto, 2005; Campbell & Smith, 2005; Galley & Clifton, 2004; Söderman & Snead, 2008; Ureily, Reichel, & Ron, 2003; Wearing, 2001, 2004) and values (e.g., Campbell & Smith, 2006; Halpenny & Caissie, 2003). Researchers have also focused on benefits of volunteer tourism, including volunteer self-fulfillment and personal growth, helping projects and contributing new insights, spreading knowledge, positive host–guest relationships, and positive social movements (e.g., Brown & Lehto, 2005; Foster-Smith & Evans, 2003; Lepp, 2008; McGehee, 2002; McGehee & Santos, 2005; Ruhanen, Cooper, & Fayos-Solá, 2008; Wearing, 2001). Although some of these researchers interviewed only volunteers, others also talked with community members and project staff to determine their impressions of benefits and disadvantages of volunteer tourism (e.g., Clifton & Benson, 2006; Coghlan, 2008; Gray & Campbell, 2007; Lepp, 2008; McIntosh & Zahra, 2008; Sin, 2010).

Few researchers, however, have explicitly addressed the influence of promotional material (e.g., brochures, internet websites) in motivating volunteers, especially specific content or images in this material that attract volunteers to projects or organizations (e.g., Coghlan, 2007; Cousins, Evans, & Saddler, 2009; Simpson, 2004). When researchers have discussed connections between promotional material and motivations, it usually has been ancillary to the main focus of their research or examined in relation to how this material appealed to motivations for volunteering abroad more generally (e.g., adventure, danger; Ansell, 2008; Simpson, 2005). Researchers who have explored how promotional material influenced volunteer decisions about organizations and projects often employed textual analysis of the material, but rarely interviewed volunteers directly to verify if and how this material played a motivating role (e.g., Coghlan, 2007; Young, 2008).

Not understanding the role of promotional material in influencing volunteer decisions is an important knowledge gap because in the increasingly competitive volunteer tourism market, projects and

organizations must advertise projects and services to recruit volunteers necessary for monetary and physical support (Cousins et al., 2009). Organizations and project managers could benefit from and create effective promotional material by understanding: (a) if this material played a role in motivating volunteers to choose organizations and projects, (b) types of promotional material used by volunteers, (c) how volunteers accessed this information, and (d) topics in promotional material that played a motivating role. To address these issues, we interviewed volunteer tourists, project managers,[2] and volunteer coordinators to explore how and what factors in promotional material motivated individuals to select organizations and conservation project sites. This work advances motivation research and may aid organizations and project managers in recruiting volunteer tourists for conservation work.

2. Conceptual background

2.1. Motivations

Wearing (2004) stated that motivations of volunteer tourists could be examined using a variety of theories from tourism, recreation, leisure, and volunteerism (e.g., Crompton, 1979; Dann, 1981; Driver & Knopf, 1977; Driver, Tinsley, & Manfredo, 1991; Iso-Ahola, 1989; Pearce & Caltabiano, 1983; Pearce & Lee, 2005; Stebbins, 1996). One such theory is the push/pull approach, which suggests that people are pushed to travel by certain internal motivations (e.g., stress reduction) and/or pulled to a particular destination by its attributes—both tangible resources (e.g., beaches) and traveler perceptions and expectations of what the destination provides (e.g., novelty; Crompton, 1979; Uysal & Jurowski, 1994). These push and pull factors are essential in motivating tourists (Dann, 1981), and Crompton (1979) identified seven push factors (e.g., escape from perceived mundane environment, exploration and evaluation of self, facilitation of social interaction) and two pull factors (cultural motives, novelty). Many researchers have applied this framework to study motivations of tourists (e.g., Delamere & Wright, 1997; Fluker & Turner, 2000).

This push/pull approach is only one way to understand motivations. Iso-Ahola (1979, 1989) contended that all leisure motivations can be classified as seeking or escaping in that people seek intrinsic rewards and escape everyday problems and troubles (Iso-Ahola, 1982, 1989). Utilizing Maslow's hierarchy of needs, Pearce and Caltabiano (1983) and Pearce and Lee (2005) formulated the Travel Career Ladder (TCL) and Travel Career Pattern (TCP), which illustrates that inexperienced tourists are more interested in fulfilling lower order needs (e.g., relationship, stimulation, relaxation), whereas experienced tourists are motivated to fulfill higher order needs (e.g., development, fulfillment). Another approach to motivations contends that they are formed by the expectation that efforts to participate (e.g., spend money, time) will lead to performance (e.g., backpack in wilderness), which will result in outcomes and benefits (e.g., stress release; Driver et al., 1991; Manfredo, Driver, & Brown, 1983; Manfredo, Driver, & Tarrant, 1996). To measure motivations, Driver et al. (1991) created the Recreation Experience Preference (REP) scales. These include over 300 variables grouped into 19 domains, most of which represent internal push factors (e.g., enjoy nature, meet new people, escape personal/social pressures; Driver et al., 1991; Manfredo et al., 1983).

Studies in volunteerism also have examined motivations, especially those related to decisions to volunteer. Most researchers recognize that volunteering usually contains both altruistic and self-interested motivations (e.g., King & Lynch, 1998). Others, however, have emphasized either altruistic or self-interested motivations, but not both.

Stebbins (1996), for example, suggested that volunteering is a form of serious leisure and self-interestedness is a greater driving force than altruism because volunteers expect personal and social rewards for the activity. To measure motivations for volunteering, Clary, Snyder, and Stukas (1996) and Clary et al. (1998) created the Volunteer Functions Index (VFI), which demarcated six functions: values, understanding, enhancement, career, protective, and social. Silverberg, Ellis, Backman, and Backman (1999) and Silverberg, Ellis, Whitworth, and Kane (2002/2003) applied this index to volunteers in parks and recreation and determined that it described volunteer functions, but additional co-producer functions existed (e.g., "department and community need me," "benefits to people I know"). Environmental volunteering has required an expansion of motivations identified in human volunteering to account for specific motivations related to the environment or animals, such as to help the environment and work with specific animal species (e.g., Bruyere & Rappe, 2007; Grese, Kaplan, Ryan, & Buxton, 2000; Markus & Blackshaw, 1998).

Researchers of volunteer tourism have used these approaches to examine why people volunteer abroad, and to a lesser extent why they chose the country, organization, or project. Similar to findings from broader volunteering, volunteer tourists hold both altruistic (e.g., desire to help, give back, make a difference) and self-interested motivations for volunteering abroad (e.g., authentic travel, gain experience, engage in travel and adventure, learn, pleasure-seeking, personal growth, cultural exchange, professional development, camaraderie; Broad, 2003; Brown & Lehto, 2005; Caissie & Halpenny, 2003; Campbell & Smith, 2005; Chen & Chen, 2011; Wearing, 2001, 2004). Pearce and Coghlan (2008) contended that the TCP could predict similarities and differences in motivations of experienced and inexperienced volunteer tourists. Both groups would be motivated by novelty, escape/relaxation, and relationship, but less experienced volunteer tourists would provide a larger range of motivations and veterans would emphasize involvement with host communities and settings. Despite this body of research on volunteer tourist motivations, most of this work has examined altruistic and self-interested motivations that primarily push individuals to participate.

Comparatively less research has examined pull motivations of volunteer tourists, especially attributes that draw individuals to a specific country or continent, organization, or project (e.g., Söderman & Snead, 2008). Researchers who have discussed these issues either mentioned findings briefly or secondary to their research focus (e.g., Simpson, 2005). Reasons for why volunteers select a country or continent included danger, the unknown, scenery, to conduct specific projects that occur in certain countries (e.g., sea turtle work), to learn a language, timing, family or friend recommendations, and the belief that developing countries need help (Campbell & Smith, 2005; Simpson, 2005; Söderman & Snead, 2008; Wearing, 2004). Research has shown that volunteer tourists select an organization for its reputation, program variety and structure, marketing, safety, specific projects (e.g., sea turtle projects), organization type (e.g., NGO), people involved, and recommendations from family or friends (Campbell & Smith, 2005; Coghlan, 2007; Söderman & Snead, 2008; Wearing, 2001). Reasons people are attracted to specific volunteer projects include recommendations from others, as well as project location, opportunities, and perks (Broad, 2003; Caissie & Halpenny, 2003; Campbell & Smith, 2005).

2.2. Promotional material

Researchers studying promotional material have examined it in conjunction with push motivations. In non-tourism situations, for example, advertisements appealing to internal personal motivations of potential volunteers were more persuasive in encouraging people to volunteer (Clary, Snyder, Ridge, Miene, & Haugen, 1994). In volunteer tourism, promotional material has advertised the volunteer

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[2] The managers were also directors of the reserve. For clarity, we only use "manager" throughout the article.

experience as a means of satisfying potential volunteer desires for authentic and different experiences, exploration and adventure, danger and risk, purposeful travel, meeting people, learning, and skill development (Ansell, 2008; Broad, 2003; Simpson, 2004). Callanan and Thomas (2005) analyzed promotional material on the internet and classified volunteer tourists and volunteer projects as shallow, intermediate, or deep tourism based on self-interested versus altruistic motivations for volunteering abroad and how much a program catered to volunteers. Shallow volunteer tourists, for example, focused on self-development, volunteered for short periods, had no specific skills, and made little direct contribution to the community and environment.

Given that promotional material (e.g., websites, brochures) typically highlights organizational, destination, or project attributes, it is important to understand if it influences volunteer selections. By employing textual analysis, Young (2008) determined that guidebooks catered to volunteer desires for selecting destinations that provide authentic, cultural experiences. Söderman and Snead (2008) mentioned that marketing played a role in motivating volunteers to choose certain organizations, but they did not explain how or if marketing influenced other decisions, such as selecting a specific project. Cousins (2007) found many projects advertised on the internet and selected by volunteers involved mammals, required no special skills, and were located in tropical locations, but it is unclear whether promotional material influenced volunteer selection or if volunteer preferences influenced which projects were advertised. Callanan and Thomas (2005) claimed that promotional material for "shallow volunteer tourism projects" focused on destination attributes and travel experiences, whereas "deep volunteer tourism projects" emphasized the project. Although not specifically studying motivations, Simpson (2004) suggested that promotional material represented and sold development and the "third world" to potential volunteers, even if it did not accurately represent marginalized people with whom volunteers may work (Wearing, 2001). These romanticized versions of other people and places may have influenced some volunteers to select destinations, organizations, or projects. Coghlan (2007) examined how factors such as organizational mission statements, promotional photographs, and past volunteer testimonies could attract potential volunteers and influence their expectations; respondents focused on characteristics of the organization (e.g., price, length), brochure attributes (e.g., quality, outlay), and elements in brochures (e.g., project focus, organization role).

Although this body of research illustrates relationships between promotional material and motivations of volunteer tourists, knowledge gaps remain. First, several studies focused on how promotional material related more generally to the desire to volunteer abroad, not how it influenced specific choices (e.g., Broad, 2003). Second, in several cases this topic was not discussed in great detail or the primary focus of the paper (e.g., Ansell, 2008). Third, researchers examining pull motives (e.g., Callanan & Thomas, 2005; Young, 2008) largely relied on textual analysis of promotional material and did not ask volunteers if this material motivated them or what images or content specifically played a motivating role. Coghlan (2007), for example, did not interview volunteers directly and instead relied on a multiple sorting process performed by postgraduate conservation and tourism students; these students were older than several additional important segments of volunteer tourists, such as gap year and undergraduates, and arguably more knowledgeable about tourism than many potential volunteer tourists (e.g., Galley & Clifton, 2004; Wearing, 2001). Similarly, Cousins et al. (2009) talked with organizations and directors/managers about their promotional material and attempts to attract volunteers, but the authors did not interview volunteers to see if the promotional material actually played a motivating role. Our research extends both Coghlan's (2007) and Cousins et al.'s (2009) work by interviewing volunteer tourists.

We aim for our study to also inform research on effects of pull motivations and promotional material in non-volunteer tourism. Results of studies examining relationships between promotional material and tourist motivations have varied. Eagles and Wind (1994) identified pull factors that ecotourism operators believed were important to their clients (e.g., rivers, mountains, birds), but their content analysis of promotional material did not explore if these characteristics motivated tourists. Manfredo (1989) surveyed potential tourists and examined tourism brochures focusing on trip characteristics. He determined that people responding to images in advertisements depicting highly salient attributes (e.g., catching fish, boat/captain safety) rated those attributes higher than others and had intentions to purchase trips focusing on those attributes. Other researchers, however, have found that destination attributes in promotional material did not play a major motivating role in decisions to travel (e.g., Molina & Esteban, 2006). Taking a slightly different approach, Dann (1996) and others who have followed his example (e.g., Baloglu & McCleary, 1999; Beerli & Martin, 2004a, 2004b) tied motivation to destination image. Destination image is based on past promotion, reputation, and peer evaluation of alternatives, which generates for the tourists expectations of the place. In asking visitors about their pre- and post-visit impressions of Barbados and four promotional images generated by the country's tourism board, Dann (1996) revealed motivational forces behind the destination selection. For instance, a peaceful beach that a tourist describes as a lover's paradise implies the person might be motivated to visit for romance

Many of these studies tying together motivations and promotional material did not examine information on the internet, which is frequently used by tourists and has arguably changed traveler behavior (Buhalis & Law, 2008). Over 105 million American adults used the Internet to plan travel in 2009 (Fesenmaier & Cook, 2009). This is not surprising, as internet use has grown substantially in recent decades. For instance, in the last ten years, use has increased 152% (272,066,000 users, 78% of population) in North America; 353% (476,213,935 users, 58% of population) in Europe; 179% (21,293,830 users, 61% of population) in Oceania/Australia; and 1037.4% (215,939,400 users; 38% of population) in Latin America/Caribbean (Internet World Stats, 2011). Although we did not find statistics specific to volunteer tourists' internet usage, volunteer tourism projects are often advertised on internet websites and many volunteer tourists rely on the internet to search for these opportunities (e.g., Callanan & Thomas, 2005; Cousins, 2007; Pearce & Coghlan, 2008). By examining promotional material on the internet, we hope to build on studies examining if and how this information motivates tourists.

In the past decade, work has begun examining how the internet is used by tourists to plan vacations (e.g., Buhalis & Law, 2008). One line of research has focused on qualities of travel websites attracting volunteers. Tourists expect websites to be informative, interactive, and attractive (Chu, 2001), and Cunliffe (2000) found that if a website was poorly designed, loss of sales and potential repeat visits occurred. Kim and Lee (2004) categorized web service quality into six dimensions: ease of use, usefulness, information content, security, responsiveness, and personalization. By examining promotional material on the internet, we hope to build on these studies to determine if and what parts of this information motivates volunteer tourists.

2.3. Research questions

Although several pull factors likely motivate volunteer tourists, we focused on promotional material because it is often the first step in selecting an organization or project and illustrates other pull factors (e.g., location, project variety). Promotional material is one factor that organizations and managers can control. Given the limited research examining promotional material related to volunteer tourism as both a motivating force and a means through which to explore

other pull factors, we addressed three questions. First, what types of promotional material do volunteers use when choosing an organization or project site, and how do they access this information? Second, does promotional material motivate volunteers to choose a specific organization or project site? Third, if promotional material motivates volunteers, what in this material plays a motivating role (e.g., information, appearance, destination/project attributes)?

3. Methods

3.1. Study site

We conducted fieldwork for nine weeks (June to August) in 2008 at a biological reserve in Ecuador that offers conservation, sustainability, and social development volunteer tourism opportunities.[3] A family owns the reserve, lives onsite, manages the project, and works closely with the local community of 50 families. Although small at 814 ha, the reserve's elevation of 1100 m to 2040 m and location in the Ecuadorian Inter-Andean cloud forest affords it high biodiversity. The reserve resides in the Rio Toachi–Chiriboga Important Bird Area (IBA) and two of the world's top twenty-five biological hotspots: the Tropical Andes and the Choco Darien.

At the time of our research, the reserve listed on its website that its goals were to protect the existing forest, restore degraded areas, work toward sustainable development, create programs that foster community development, and educate about conservation. To help achieve these goals, volunteers chose from three programs with various activities: (a) "Conservation in the Cloud Forest" (e.g., reforestation, wildlife monitoring, trail work); (b) "In the Way to Sustainability" (e.g., sustainable wood and animal production, organic agriculture, alternative energy); and (c) "Social Development" (e.g., teaching). Volunteers applied to the reserve, an Ecuadorian NGO with whom the reserve had an agreement, or through international intermediary organizations (e.g., Working Abroad).[4] The NGO also worked with many intermediaries, causing some volunteers to be funneled through several organizations (e.g., intermediary to NGO to reserve). This organizational layering is common in volunteer tourism, and our exploratory study conducted at the reserve in 2007 revealed that volunteers had read varying information and paid different prices depending on the organization with which they volunteered.[5]

We selected this site because: (a) Ecuador offers numerous conservation volunteer opportunities (Callanan & Thomas, 2005; Cousins, 2007); (b) many volunteers select this reserve, allowing for diverse opinions and reducing the chance of obtaining a small sample, which can be common with on-site investigations of this nature (e.g., Lepp, 2008); (c) organizational layering allowed us to examine promotional material from various organizations; and (d) one of us volunteered at the reserve in 2005, affording credibility to gain participant trust.[6]

3.2. Data collection

We used a qualitative, case study approach that employed interviews and participant observation. Although many tourism studies employing the push–pull framework have used more quantitative survey approaches, asking respondents to rate their motivations on a scale from not at all important to extremely important, qualitative methods (e.g., interviews, focus groups) have also been conducted; this is especially true for studies of volunteer tourist motivations and instances when survey variables are not well known in advance (e.g., Broad, 2003; Campbell & Smith, 2005; Klenosky, 2002; Pearce, 1993; Pearce & Lee, 2005).

Qualitative research addresses questions concerning interpretations of meanings, concepts, symbols, and metaphors, and analyzing ways in which humans make sense of their surroundings (Berg, 2004). Qualitative research can involve a case study, which is "an empirical inquiry that investigates contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident" and employs multiple sources of evidence for triangulation (Yin, 2003, p. 13). Results from case studies cannot be generalized to all situations, but they can provide a general understanding of similar groups or phenomena because human behavior is rarely unique to a single group (Berg, 2004).

We digitally audio-recorded semi-structured interviews in English with 36 volunteer tourists, 2 Ecuadorian reserve managers, and 3 volunteer coordinators (1 from the reserve, and 2 from the NGO). This included all volunteers present during the nine weeks, except six who we did not have time to interview because they arrived at the end of our stay. All participants were fluent or native English speakers. By conducting interviews during the summer months (June to August), which according to demographic research conducted by the NGO are the most popular months for volunteering, we were able to sample from several subgroups that volunteer throughout the year (e.g., students on summer break, career break adults, gap year students [i.e., youth taking a break between secondary school and university during which they travel or work]). Consistent with past research (e.g., Campbell & Smith, 2006), we interviewed volunteers after they had been at the reserve for at least two weeks to ensure they felt settled.[7] Interviews ranged from 1 to 4 h, with most between 1.5 and 2.5 h in duration. To ensure anonymity and confidentiality, we assigned a code to each participant (e.g., VF12 = volunteer female 12, RMM = reserve manager male, VC1 = volunteer coordinator 1).

Semi-structured interviews allowed us to have an initial set of questions to provide consistency across interviews and search for patterns in participant responses, but also to expand on individual responses and explore unexpected topics in greater detail (Berg, 2004). When formulating initial interview questions, we relied on previous literature and our exploratory study from which we learned that volunteers sought promotional material on the internet and were motivated to volunteer at the reserve because of project descriptions. In the current study, we did not ask volunteers directly about the role of promotional material until the end of the interview, thereby allowing them to mention it without prompting. Examples of questions we asked included: (a) why did you choose to volunteer though the selected organization, (b) why did you select this site, and (c) was there anything in the promotional material that influenced your decision to volunteer here? After asking volunteers to recollect their motivations, we showed them printed copies of websites at which they looked when making their selection (e.g., organization, reserve) in order to remind them of information they read. We used websites given information in our exploratory study, the popularity of this method for finding information (Cousins, 2007), and our previous conversations with the reserve and NGO to determine organizations through which volunteers came. While at the reserve, if we discovered an additional organization used by volunteers, we printed its promotional material.

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[3] At the reserve managers' request, we do not disclose the reserve's name to protect the reserve and managers' identity. For that reason, we do not include the website.

[4] At the NGO's request, we do not disclose its name to protect the NGO and volunteer coordinators' identities.

[5] During the exploratory study, we informally interviewed 11 volunteers and engaged in participant observation. Though we had some set questions that we asked volunteers, interviews were primarily unstructured. This allowed respondents to discuss their motivations, concerns, and experiences, and to help us discover relevant issues to pursue in subsequent research.

[6] The reserve received 49 volunteers July–September, 2007 and 40 volunteers June–August, 2008.

[7] During our last week, due to our upcoming departure, we interviewed five volunteers who had been at the reserve for less than two weeks.

We also employed participant observation. Participant observation: (a) allows collection of greater types of data; (b) minimizes reactivity; (c) helps ask reasonable and culturally-appropriate questions; (d) provides intuitive comprehension of a culture, which allows greater confidence in data meaning; and (e) addresses research questions that cannot be examined with other techniques (Bernard, 2006). We lived, ate, and spent free time with volunteers, as well as completed daily tasks and engaged in informal conversations with volunteers and staff. This allowed us to be immersed in the volunteer tourist culture and engage regularly in conversations with volunteers and managers about volunteering, the reserve, volunteer motivations, and promotional material. Consistent with Bernard (2006), we regularly logged our methodological, descriptive, and analytic notes in a field journal, thereby having a record of field descriptions, conversations and interactions, and personal reflections. These reflections allowed us to understand and work through our opinions and reactions in a neutral venue, as well as allow us to identify unclear information. Given the continuous nature of observation and reflection, we were able to follow up and clarify with participants

3.3. Data analysis

We began transcribing interviews verbatim in the field, allowing us to discover emerging themes, or "labels for assigning units of meaning to the descriptive or inferential information compiled during a study" (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 56), and address them in subsequent interviews. To identify recurring themes pertaining to motivations and interactions, we analyzed and coded interview transcripts and our observational notes line-by-line and categorized codes into themes. We conducted multiple close readings of each transcript to inductively develop a coding scheme in which we condensed and expanded initial themes (Miles & Huberman, 1994); this reiterative process allowed us to gain familiarity with the data and confidence in final thematic codes discussed here. We then organized coded data by these thematic categories to allow easy retrieval of relevant quotes (Berg, 2004). Verbatim quotes illustrate either representative examples of or exceptions to themes, and we only altered quotes slightly to remove unnecessary words and improve readability.

We analyzed our field notes in a similar fashion (i.e., coding, reiteration, thematic categorization). We report some findings from our observations in this paper, but rely primarily on quotes from interviews. However, as other researchers employing qualitative research have reported, these observations supplemented and supported semi-structured interviews, revealed any changing opinions, and informed findings in this paper (e.g., Gray & Campbell, 2007). Interacting with volunteers, managers, and the reserve volunteer coordinator for a longer time further increased their comfort with disclosure, which was substantiated by consistently longer interviews with volunteers whose stays overlapped more with ours.

4. Results

4.1. Sociodemographic characteristics

Demographics of volunteer tourists were consistent with those found in previous research (e.g., Galley & Clifton, 2004; Wearing, 2001). Ages ranged from 17 to 43, although 70% were under 25 years of age ($n = 25$). There were almost twice as many females ($n = 23$, 64%) as males ($n = 13$, 36%). Volunteers were primarily American, Canadian, and English, but some were from Australia, New Zealand, Germany, Wales, France, and the Netherlands. Most volunteers came to the reserve through the Ecuadorian NGO ($n = 14$, 39%), reserve ($n = 6$, 17%), or the intermediary organization named Global Volunteer Network ($n = 5$, 14%). In total, volunteers used eight

intermediary organizations, although Volunteer Latin America provided contact details for the reserve and volunteers applied through the reserve. Volunteers had a mix of educational backgrounds, but almost all had attended, were attending, or were planning to attend college. Twenty-one volunteers studied or planned to study the environment or related science (e.g., biology). Twenty-five respondents had previously volunteered at home and nine had volunteered abroad. Stays ranged from 2 to 10 weeks with one volunteer staying 7 months (average = 4.5 weeks).

4.2. Use of promotional material

Our first research question addressed the type of promotional material that volunteers used when choosing a specific organization or project site and how individuals accessed this information. Almost all volunteers relied exclusively on the internet to locate information when selecting an organization or project, and all used it at some point in their search. For this reason, promotional material in this article refers to internet websites; supplemental sources included Lonely Planet and word of mouth. Most volunteers did not mention how they learned about volunteer tourism, and in turn, influenced them to look at internet sources. In some cases, they had previously volunteered or had a friend who had volunteered abroad, which led them to search for opportunities. For instance, VF1 stated, "I had already volunteered once with children…so now I thought it would be nice to do something with conservation," which led her to search for possible organizations in Lonely Planet and the internet.

Illustrating the popularity of internet searching with potential volunteers, VF8 exclaimed, "The internet is so good. It's brilliant!" RMM acknowledged, "We have a flier, but the flier—I don't know how much it works." Volunteers, such as VF6, often stumbled across the organization or project by chance: "I just…randomly found it on the internet and it looked nice and so I went with it." In some cases, volunteers first discovered the reserve on the internet, and then located organizations that sent volunteers to the site. Several volunteers did not initially search for conservation volunteer projects in Ecuador, instead looking more generally in Central or South America. While searching for volunteer opportunities on the internet, they realized the prevalence of opportunities in Ecuador. VM2 explained, "Ecuador was one of the places that I…came across and realized that there was a lot of conservation volunteering stuff happening here."

The most common method for searching and finding information was Google's search engine. We asked volunteers what words they entered when searching for volunteer opportunities. Although people reported a variety of terms, the most popular included: cloud forest, conservation internship, conservation reserves, conservation volunteering, Ecuador, environmental volunteering, volunteer abroad, volunteer South America, volunteer Latin America, and working abroad. Using these keywords allowed certain organizations to benefit. Volunteers who typed "Volunteer South America," "Volunteer Latin America," or "Working Abroad," for example, found organizations with those names listed among the first in Google's search results. Commenting on Volunteer Latin America's marketing strategy, VF12 exclaimed, "Such a good name! I'm sure they paid a fortune for that name." Knowing this is useful for organizations and managers, as some volunteers did not look beyond the first site they found. VF22, for example, typed "Working Abroad" and decided that the organization looked good and did not search further: "I don't actually spend a lot of time on the internet…if I find a website that…is pretty good, I'll just stick to that." When creating promotional material, the reserve kept in mind that volunteers searched with keywords and that certain motivations helped them choose the site. VC3 said:

> We made a focus group asking everyone how did they get to us. And we asked them…the keywords they used. And it was so

[great the] possibilities…[some] looked through volunteer work. Some others looked through Ecuador…I think the first thing is to try to analyze the first motivation that the person has of their trip…we decided to put as many possibilities as we thought it could be.

Although most volunteers searched with keywords on Google, VF9 was dissatisfied with the number of poor choices generated: "We just had a look at the internet…it was really hard to find volunteering places in South America, because if you Google it, you get like these [volunteer opportunities that] you pay $600 … or maybe even more."

In some situations, volunteers did not use the internet to locate an opportunity, but rather relied on it to verify an organization or project. This occurred most often if a volunteer heard about the organization or project from a friend or family member. For example, VM8 wanted to volunteer at the reserve because of his cousin's recommendation, but he and a friend looked at the website to learn more before committing: "My cousin went through the website with us and… highlighted some of the things and after that I didn't look at it. I just looked at the jobs, and [how to] apply, and the prices."

Even more common were volunteers who had received a recommendation for an organization, but searched for specific sites and projects listed on its website. VM6's brother and father had volunteered through the intermediary organization, i-to-i, and because they had a good time, VM6 "surfed [its] website" for projects in South America. A friend's recommendation caused VM5 to examine the NGO's promotional material in detail: "I found [the NGO] and then it provided all the different sites, and I looked at each site…painstakingly, so I could pick…the best site that interested me the most." By relying on personal recommendations, volunteers reduced time spent searching the internet and used promotional material for a focused search.

In addition to traditional promotional material found online (e.g., organization websites), volunteers were also motivated by promotional material located on social networking and media sites, such as Facebook. This is not surprising given that most volunteers were under 25 and these online networks are popular communication tools with this demographic. Supporting Facebook's popularity, VM7 stated, "Facebook's such a huge thing now, and a lot of people use Facebook to identify things." The reserve had its own Facebook page and was linked to a Facebook page created by former volunteers. Volunteers also found out about the Facebook pages from friends who had previously volunteered at the site. On the Facebook page created by former volunteers, they discussed their experiences, prospective volunteers asked questions, and recent volunteers posted pictures and provided updates. VM7 mentioned that this influenced his decision to choose the reserve: "You can go onto the [reserve] group and you can take a lot of feedback from what people had to say…a lot of that…was all positive really. It gave us the push to go for it." VF15 said that the organization through which she volunteered, Volunteer Abroad, also had a Facebook group on which people posted the positive and negatives of the projects offered.

Volunteers also mentioned how Facebook could help continue a connection to this place, in turn bolstering recruitment. While we helped VM9, a volunteer who spent 7 months at the reserve, hang interpretive signs, he told us that he believed photos and updates on Facebook could help volunteers see the progress of their work; whereas he had the benefit of seeing much change, most volunteers staying a month do not always see tangible results. VF15 agreed:

A Facebook profile [would] keep people informed as to what's going on…I feel like after I go here I kind of lose touch…You can send an email off every once in a while, but it would be nice to just be able to pop onto the computer and be like, 'oh yeah, look, I started that project and now it's done months later'… they can recruit volunteers that way.

The managers also recognized the value of Facebook, but RMF mentioned a limitation of this and other internet tools that required fast paced, rapid response: the reserve did not have internet on-site. This was also evidenced in the fact that only a handful of volunteers had known about the Facebook site beforehand, indicating that it should be more widely advertised, because as VF15 exclaimed, "It's a fantastic marketing tool!" Since this research was conducted, however, the reserve found reliable internet service and has posted project updates on its Facebook site.

Volunteers also used internet social media to verify their choices before committing to the program. On the reserve's website was a link to a short documentary made about the reserve that was posted on YouTube. VM10 mentioned that he watched the video on YouTube, which gave him visuals of the location. Although he had already decided to go to the reserve, had he seen something he did not like, he might have not volunteered at the site. Volunteers also mentioned that online reviews helped finalize their decisions. VF12 had originally planned to go to another project, but she recalled, "I typed it on the internet and spent about two hours looking for someone to say something about it and the thing I read was really bad." In contrast, this project had all positive reviews. Similarly, VF10 said, "I Googled the program…to just see what came up and it was all…positive stuff. I figured if it was a scam somewhere along the way there would be a blog saying this is a scam, 'don't do it,' but there was nothing like that."

4.3. Promotional material as a motivating factor

Our remaining research questions addressed whether promotional material motivated volunteers to choose a specific organization or project site, and if so, what content and images in this material (e.g., information, appearance, destination/project attributes) played a motivating role. Almost all volunteers we interviewed said that promotional material motivated them to choose the organization or project. Similar to findings in previous research (Chu, 2001; Coghlan, 2007; Kim & Lee, 2004), major components that influenced their decision were the layout, appearance, and content. Volunteers, however, were not homogenous, and factors that we discuss here illustrate general trends and were not mentioned by all volunteers.

4.3.1. Layout and appearance

Volunteers mentioned the importance of a professional, organized, and well designed website. VF6 admitted, "I think [the NGO] just seemed put together, which I mean, I guess is a kinda shallow way to approach, but being a Westerner—it was just they had a very well-organized website." How Global Volunteer Network (GVN) organized the information about different available projects helped VF2 select the reserve: "The information on the different reserves [was] presented in a way that you could compare and contrast the different reserves and actually figure out what it was you wanted and what reserve offered those things." Volunteers, such as VM1, looked for other options if they found a website that did not seem professional or organized:

I looked at, I think it was Volunteer Latin America…It was the least user-friendly website I've ever come across. They gave you like three days…of the month that you can contact them and that was it and I was working on all three of those days, so it was just like, "Forget this!"

Volunteers also mentioned that they were more likely to choose an organization with a website that was easy to navigate because they appreciated finding information quickly. VF15 believed, "People lose interest if they can't find the information they are looking for. So having the information at your fingertips in an easy to read, easy to manipulate, easy to get around the site way is

important." When looking through the promotional material, VM11 stated:

> [GVN] does have a well laid out website. It had the information available that I was looking for…which a lot of other websites obscure…A lot of the websites are interconnected, so I kept getting directed to the same list of volunteer opportunities. There is a lot of unhelpful information out there. GVN seems to be a more straightforward website and organization.

VF12 felt that the ease of navigating Volunteer South America's website spoke to the organization's practices: "It looked professional…it was just laid out in a way that was easy to use, which made me think that they might be like a simple company, easier to deal with." If websites were disorganized and volunteers could not locate the desired information quickly, they continued searching for organizations. VF14 explained, "I looked through a bunch of sites, and a lot of the other ones were really hard to navigate through. I was like, moving on, next one."

Several volunteers indicated that organizations or projects with organized and seemingly professional websites appeared legitimate, and volunteers trusted these over organizations that had, in VM1's words, "sketchier websites." For VF19, the NGO's website caused her to believe that, "It seemed to exist, which I think is an issue with so many opportunities on the internet these days. You wonder, 'If I arrive, will it actually be there? Does it really exist?'" VF15 had a favorable impression of the reserve simply because it had a website:

> Some of the places didn't have websites. So, the fact that this had a website made it feel…more legitimate. 'Cause if you are coming to do volunteering work and you are paying all this money, you want to make sure you are coming with an organization that you believe in and that you feel has some legitimacy and some reputation.

Interestingly, although volunteers relied on the internet to find organizations, many realized that they could be misled by websites. Given that VF11's friend had a positive experience with the NGO, she was more comfortable volunteering through it: "It wasn't just, pay lots of money to something and then you're not sure where it goes…you never know from a Google search what reality is versus what they put on a website." VM4 acknowledged, "You can arrange that so the last shithole looks nice…you never know how it is until you were there." Despite recognizing this risk, volunteers overwhelmingly judged organizations or projects partially by how professional, organized, and navigable the website appeared.

4.3.2. Content—photographs

Photographs were one of the first things that volunteers viewed when visiting a webpage, and some volunteers admitted that these images attracted them to the reserve due to representations of the setting, accommodations, and activities. VF15 exclaimed, "When I saw the reserve's pictures, I was like holy crow, this looks amazing." Acknowledging that the picture of the volunteer house influenced him, VM13 said that it seemed a comfortable place to stay for two months. Volunteers indicated that the pictures fit with how they envisioned the landscape and their experience. VF13, for example, remembered, "When the page opened up, there was the person on the boat on the water. I guess it might be [another NGO reserve], but that's sort of my idea of…being on a river in the Amazon, like on one of those boats." Interestingly, as seen from this quote, some volunteers revealed that they did not have a clear understanding of a cloud forest, and rather their destination image had been formed by more popular portrayals of the rainforest. VF15 pointed to a photograph on Volunteer Abroad's webpage that pictured a group moving a log and explained that she liked "this picture because it's not just one individual doing a job. It's a group of individuals working toward a common goal…it shows the team effort." Volunteers indicated that images were fairly accurate in representing the reserve, although many mentioned, such as VF1 "that it just makes it look like everything is a little bit nicer." Although some volunteers were attracted to the photographs, many, such as VM11, asserted that these images were not the deciding factors: "It has some pretty photographs, which does help, [but] I am not going to be sold just by photographs."

4.3.3. Content—volunteer comments and testimonials

Volunteers also appreciated past volunteer comments or blogs in the promotional material for similar reasons that they turned to social networking and media sites: former volunteer feedback about positives and negatives of the site. VF21 said that positive volunteer comments on the reserve's website were one of the reasons she chose the location. When looking through the material, VF1 pointed to a testimonial that she remembered: "'It was definitely the best time of my life' and I was like, 'Wow! Hey, this must be good.'" VF14 stated, "I think the comment page is really good. If you analyze it, you can tell which places have the most comments, and you'd read something… like, 'Oh I was there for a month and I was the only one there'… okay I'm not going to go there." However, several volunteers were skeptical and even annoyed at filling websites with volunteer comments and testimonials. VM11 complained, "I hate websites that put quotes from former volunteers because [organizations] can choose whatever quotes they want, so I don't trust it at all. I ignore them."

4.3.4. Content—information

Almost all of the volunteers interviewed claimed that information illustrating pull factors (e.g., ecosystem) on the website played a major role in their decision to choose the organization or project. When asked if the information he read factored into his decision, VM2 answered, "Definitely, because that was what I was basing my decision on." Volunteers especially appreciated websites of organizations that provided details about the location, project, and cost because this was the information that guided their decisions. VF11 noted, "[The NGO's website] was extensive. It had the different locations, [was] very clear about what was going on at each location— clear not only about the work you would be doing, but free time activities and things like that." Information in the promotional material also helped volunteers choose the reserve. VM11 illustrated the connection between information in the promotional material and his decision: "I chose the reserve I did because I found information about it…readily accessible information."

Specifically, information about the location of the reserve and ecosystem appealed to most volunteers. Volunteers might have been drawn to a cloud forest beforehand, but many admitted that prior to reading about it, they did not know much about the ecosystem. After reading about the setting, a clearer image of the destination formed for some volunteers. For example, VF15 thought the description made the setting sound inviting: "Living in a cloud forest is pretty cool. I would be lying if I said that wasn't a part of the reason I chose it here." Lists of the animals living within the reserve also influenced volunteers' decisions, although several mentioned that they did not see as much wildlife as they had anticipated. Volunteers with scientific backgrounds were attracted to the location because the promotional material described, to varying degrees, ecological concepts with which they were familiar. Several volunteers mentioned that they selected the reserve because of its location within two of the earth's top twenty-five biodiversity hotspots, a concept they learned in class and equated to being able to experience seeing many species and conduct environmental work in an ecologically important area.

Detailed descriptions of volunteer tasks also motivated volunteers to choose the project, because they wanted to both know that the project fulfilled their reasons for volunteering and they knew what they would be doing each day at the reserve. Working Abroad, for

example, listed specific tasks (e.g., plant trees, monitor wildlife, work in garden) on their website, causing VM13 to anticipate that the reserve had "everything [he] wanted." Given weather, seasonality, resource availability, and researchers present, not all activities were available at the time, which volunteers mentioned surprised and upset them (e.g., chocolate making). For example, many volunteers had hoped to participate in wildlife research, but this was usually only possible when researchers were present or volunteers already had research skills and experience. The managers mentioned that organizations change the order of the list, causing volunteers to expect some activities to be a greater priority than they were. Commenting on the reserve's extensive descriptions, VF9 stated:

> It is a really good thing to write down the specific tasks, not only, we do nature conservation, we do reforestation, we do sustainable development, but also say you have to do this and that…because then you really know what you're going to do when you're here.

This volunteer also said that if she and her boyfriend read projects with vague descriptions, they "kicked them out" of their choices. Despite detailed descriptions, volunteers admitted that information about the reserve and volunteer activities made it seem further along and that descriptions included both current projects and those that the reserve planned to work on in the future. However, most understood, and as VM4 stated, "I think the sustainable thing is like not the one I imagined, but I also think it wasn't their intention to lie…It's just like a different, maybe image of that. And the rest of the stuff was described pretty fair."

In addition to project details, information about the reserve's mission to help both the environment and local people appealed to volunteers because they wanted to volunteer for a good cause. When looking at the reserve's promotional material, VF21 stated, "[the mission] sounds very approachable to me. That is actually very important for Ecuador, becoming a model of integrated farming." For some people, the reserve's mission determined the country where they volunteered. VF5 explained, "I …looked around on the internet…I really liked what the reserve was trying to do… it was a good cause…I think that I would have went wherever the reserve was—if it was in Ecuador or…Argentina."

Almost all volunteers mentioned that price was a deciding factor in selecting the organization, given their income level, desire for budget travel, or feeling conflicted about paying to volunteer. Searching for price information was one of the first things that most volunteers did when viewing promotional material. VF18 explained her process: "I looked at programs, went to Ecuador, clicked on that [link]…and I looked at the cost for 10 weeks." If the cost was perceived as unreasonable, most volunteers navigated to another website instead of looking at the material in greater detail. VM13 admitted, "I went probably through six websites…[Working Abroad] was…half [the price of] a lot of the other ones." VF12 was one of many volunteers who struggled with paying to volunteer, and therefore sought the best deal, "I just think we shouldn't have to pay the rates that we pay to volunteer… I think they'd have more volunteers if it was cheaper, because flights are quite expensive as well."

Although volunteers highlighted the importance of information in promotional material, some indicated that given the overlay of organizations, the information they read did not clearly distinguish the organization from the project. VF10 acknowledged:

> I looked at [the project descriptions] and read each one and…it was later on when I actually got the program information from GVN that they're like…here go to the reserve's website…I never thought of it as a separate station…I just thought of them all as one.

VM2 admitted after he paid, he discovered that he was four organizations removed from the project. Some volunteers stated that if they had known the reserve was separate from the organization, they would have chosen to come directly through the reserve. The lack of clarity may have caused some volunteers to choose larger, more expensive organizations that replicated, with permission, information contained in the reserve's promotional material.

4.3.5. Content—environmental concepts and buzzwords

Although environmental concepts and buzzwords overlap with volunteer tasks (e.g., sustainable agriculture), the prevalence of these themes in volunteer responses makes it is important to discuss them separately. We identified key terms from words that volunteers used to search for projects, concepts that volunteers mentioned in interviews, and project descriptions in promotional material (e.g., "conservation in the cloud forest"). Some recurring terms were "sustainability," "conservation," "reforestation," and "community development." Volunteers mentioned these buzzwords on their own or when asked what words, concepts, and photographs stood out in the promotional material. Volunteers indicated that these terms motivated them to choose the organization or project because these concepts are inextricably linked with environmental efforts. VM5 said, "The big buzzwords, and why I choose the reserve, was the fact that it had and they wanted to practice sustainability, that it was an area that had biodiversity, and that it was working toward conservation." Promotional material often included several buzzwords in one sentence such as one that VF1 highlighted, which she said made the reserve seem incredible in its efforts: "The station works in natural conservation, combating deforestation, protecting existing forest, restoring degraded areas, and searching for sustainable activities." Even if they recognized these to be buzzwords, volunteers still acknowledged the power of these words to motivate them to volunteer through the organization or at the reserve. VF19 explained:

> Because I was looking for it…I felt that there was quite a lot of stuff on community development and sustainability. [The NGO] talked about alternative income generating projects, which is a great catchphrase in the development world and it's really important in terms of community development, but that's what jumped out at me…Obviously they are putting 'sustainable' every second word, and everyone likes to hear that.

When looking through the promotional material we had brought, volunteers would sometime comment that the attractive descriptions were more "fantastic-sounding" than reality; for instance, VF6 said "biofood production" only seemed to consist of bread-making.

5. Discussion

5.1. Summary of findings

We explored the extent that volunteer tourists used promotional material, if this material motivated them to select an organization or volunteer project, and what specifically in this promotional material played a motivating role. Volunteers almost exclusively used the internet to search for volunteer tourism opportunities. Volunteers who had an organization or project recommended to them by a friend or family member still examined promotional material on websites to either confirm that choice or select a specific project. In almost all cases, volunteers used Google's search engine as a starting point and entered keywords such as "conservation," "volunteer abroad," and "Ecuador" to find information.

Once volunteers located promotional material, their decision to choose the organization or project was influenced by both overall appearance of and specific content on websites, and most attributes

advertised in the material were factors that pulled volunteers to the project or organization. As Coghlan (2007) suggested, volunteers, like other types of travelers, were attracted to organizations with websites that were organized and professional in appearance (Buhalis & Law, 2008; Chu, 2001; Cunliffe, 2000). Similar to tourists surveyed by Kim and Lee (2004), volunteers did not want to spend much time finding information and tended to remain on websites they considered easy to use. For many volunteers, a seemingly organized and professional website led them to believe that the project or organization was legitimate; volunteers often feared that projects would be unsatisfactory or nonexistent. Although several volunteers recognized that photographs or information could be deceiving, they still admitted to trusting and being influenced by seemingly professional websites.

Particular content on a website motivated volunteers, especially photographs, volunteer comments, project descriptions, and buzzwords. Volunteers seemed split on the effect of photographs and volunteer testimonial in influencing their choices. They acknowledged that the information content played a role in their decisions. Similar to other types of tourists (Chu, 2001; Kim & Lee, 2004), volunteers appreciated promotional material that was informative and provided detailed descriptions of the project because it was usually all they had available to inform them about the project. Volunteers also searched for buzzwords in promotional material (e.g., conservation, sustainability) that reflected their interests and activities in which they wanted to engage. Our findings have implications for management, theory, and future research.

5.2. Managerial implications and practical applications

Before discussing managerial implications, we must address two potential limitations of our study, which result from it being an on-site, case study. First, our study only examined one volunteer project, and therefore, our findings may not generalize to all volunteer tourism situations. People not motivated by factors described by the volunteers in this study might choose organizations and projects that advertise factors salient for them, such as charismatic megafauna (Campbell & Smith, 2006; Cousins et al., 2009). This limitation is somewhat mitigated by the fact that our sample included people who volunteered through various organizations, thereby reading different promotional material. Despite this limitation and given that we found a strong connection between promotional material and motivations, we recommend that other organizations and project managers ask their volunteers about elements in promotional material that played a motivating role to know what pulled volunteers to their site. We emphasize that these recommendations might not apply to all projects or organizations, but this research can provide ideas about questions that managers might want to ask. In addition, it can provide groundwork for further research questions on this topic that could inform managers.

The second potential limitation is that we asked respondents to reflect back on their decision-making process instead of interviewing volunteers prior to and during their selection of a project or organization. Methodologically, finding potential volunteer tourists when they are considering volunteering and making their initial decisions is difficult to accomplish. As our study showed, most volunteers used the internet and by the time they contacted an organization, they usually had decided to volunteer through that organization. The difficulty in locating respondents before they make their selection has been recognized by other researchers. Coghlan (2007), for example, stated, "As it was difficult to survey potential tourists who had requested organizational brochures, it was decided that research students who had an interest in tourism, conservation, biological or tropical science would be used instead." Unlike Coghlan (2007), we interviewed actual volunteer tourists. However, we believe that methods such as a panel study where volunteers are followed over multiple years and

sites would contribute to this area of research. In addition, to reach potential volunteers, interviews or surveys could be conducted at volunteer tourism information fairs. Using the internet to survey potential volunteers is another possible method, as pre-trip surveys asking about the decision making process could be included as an online links or sent via email to volunteers who contact organizations or projects with questions; follow-up surveys could be distributed via email to volunteers (Benfield & Szlemko, 2006; Hung & Law, 2011). We believe, however, that our results illustrate that volunteer tourists could remember salient characteristics in the promotional material that pulled them to the project or organization.

Our results can also help organizations and projects create promotional material that attracts volunteers. This might be especially useful for smaller organization or projects that wish to attract volunteers directly to gain greater independence from international organizations and earn more (Cousins et al., 2009), but need to focus their limited resources on effective means. For instance, almost all volunteers at this reserve used the internet and Google to locate organizations or projects. If this is the case with other projects, managers and organizations should focus resources on internet promotional material, rather than flyers or brochures. In some cases, word of mouth was effective for influencing individuals to choose an organization or project, but promotional material remained extremely important because volunteers still examined websites before making a final decision. Given that volunteers searched using keywords or "buzzwords," organizations and managers may wish to find out what terms volunteers used and include relevant words in their information; this may enable their website to be listed among the first in Google's search results resulting in "search-engine optimization" (Cousins et al., 2009). Managers should be cautious, however, of creating promotional material that attracts or recruits volunteers under false pretenses. Our study and past research (Coghlan, 2007; Lyons, 2003) suggest that promotional material influenced volunteer expectations and if it did not match expectations, dissatisfaction could occur.

If working with multiple organizations, managers should be aware of how other websites represent their information and project. Many volunteer tourists use intermediary organizations that have never been to the project, and these volunteers may never see the project's promotional material or only view it after paying the organization. Cousins et al. (2009) explain that given the increased competition, larger organizations are secretive of specific details that may lead potential volunteers to host organizations or projects. We found that some volunteers initially were unaware of the multiple organizations involved. Given this disconnect, managers should be cautious of their partner organizations for several reasons. First, volunteers emphasized the importance of a professional-looking and easy to navigate website. Not only should this lead organizations and project managers to take time and care with any website they create, they should be aware of their partnering organizations' websites. If projects work with organizations that have disorganized or unprofessional websites, they might lose potential volunteers who are negatively influenced by this promotional material. Second, some intermediary organizations might also intentionally or unintentionally present incorrect depictions of the setting (e.g., rainforest), in their photographs or descriptions. This can reinforce or form inaccurate destination images and result in dissatisfaction among volunteer tourists when the place is not what they expected (Dann, 1996). Finally, in some cases, intermediary organizations care primarily about profit, and capitalizing on volunteer motivations to help, these organizations advertise that volunteers will make an enormous impact on poverty and the environment (e.g., Simpson, 2004). However, unskilled volunteers sometimes cannot make a vast difference and can even negatively impact the project and local people, which can leave volunteers feeling disillusioned (e.g., Guttentag, 2009; Palacios, 2010).

Social networking tools (e.g., TripAdvisor) have increased in popularity among tourists planning a vacation (Buhalis & Law, 2008) and we found this trend also existed among volunteer tourists. Organizations and managers might want to explore innovative tools, such as Facebook and personal blogs, for recruiting volunteers because some volunteers mentioned that they enjoyed volunteer comments and blogs, and most used social networking and media tools. These tools can keep former volunteers up to date and help them retain a connection to the site. Given that projects might turn to volunteers for help with fundraising, retaining past volunteer interest is also important. Social networking sites can also be used as a way to request donations or help; the reserve in this study has posted appeals on their Facebook page and comments indicated a desire to assist in its efforts. Managers and organizations should also be aware of how blogs and internet resources represent them online. Although they might not be able to change reviews, they may be able to counter incorrect information on their site or, if the review is accurate, change their actions so that future volunteers can inform others that things have improved.

5.3. Theoretical implications and future research

Our research also has several implications for theory and future research. First, it suggests that researchers should give greater attention to effects of promotional material found on websites. Many volunteer tourists are pre-college, college, or recently graduated students, thereby growing up in the "internet age" and relying on the internet to search for opportunities (Cousins, 2007; Galley & Clifton, 2004; Wearing, 2001). These individuals have recently or will soon reach the age when they seek other tourism opportunities. Given this shift, tourism research examining promotional material and motivations also should focus on the internet, rather than just brochures, magazines, and other traditional methods of information dissemination and promotion (e.g., Baas, Manfredo, Lee, & Allen, 1989; Molina & Esteban, 2006). In addition, now that we have illustrated that internet promotional material plays a motivating factor in organization and project choice, future research can explore in greater detail how websites fit into the entire decision-making process of volunteer tourists, as has been examined in other tourism situations (e.g., Cai, Feng, & Breiter, 2004).

Additionally, our research extends methods for analyzing how promotional material influences volunteer tourists by including interviews with volunteers. Although an organization might present project or organization attributes in its promotional material, talking to volunteers may be necessary to determine if these factors actually appealed to or motivated volunteers. As we discovered, volunteers mentioned that some promotional material contained unappealing elements and caused them to avoid selecting certain organizations or projects. Our study only focused on volunteers at this reserve and volunteers who did not choose this reserve might not have found the same attributes salient. To see if these trends are widespread, future research should examine tourists who looked at different promotional material and chose different projects and organizations. Given that initial results on this topic indicate common themes, we also encourage researchers to develop survey instruments to determine if these themes remain consistent and generalize across various sites, organizations, projects, and countries.

Much of the literature on volunteer tourist motivations has examined push factors (e.g., Broad, 2003; Brown & Lehto, 2005; Galley & Clifton, 2004); pull factors have received less attention. Although it may be argued that volunteers already had the desire to volunteer abroad when they looked for opportunities, the attention these individuals gave to their selections indicated that project and organization attributes (e.g., cloud forest, reputable) and the extent that promotional material portrayed these attributes were important. By focusing more on pull factors, researchers will be able to aid managers. Managers or organizations might not be able to push a person to volunteer abroad, but if they desire, they can design projects that include factors that attract volunteers.[8] In examining specific content in promotional material, we found that pull factors (e.g., cloud forest, project tasks) motivated volunteers to select the organization or project. Future research should examine these and other pull factors in volunteer decisions to select organizations, destinations, or projects.

Future research may also want to examine the complicated relationships among managers, organizations, and promotional materials. Researchers could expand this work to examine both the service and volunteer perspectives; currently most papers have focused on interviewing or surveying either volunteers or service providers, but not both. On-site, qualitative research could help researchers understand how promotional material impacts the volunteer experience, specifically focusing on how accurately the material matches reality, fulfills motivations, and resulting effects on satisfaction and manager–volunteer relationships. Using participant observation would be especially useful in understanding interactions among participants.

Volunteers' concerns with organization and project legitimacy, reputation, and trust also warrant greater attention. Volunteers mentioned repeatedly their apprehension about not selecting a legitimate organization or a project that actually exists. This is of interest especially to smaller organizations or reserves wishing to attract volunteers directly, as they may not have funds to create sophisticated websites. This might result in volunteers choosing larger organizations, which would cause some volunteer fees to remain in the organization to cover administrative costs. In turn, projects might not receive funding necessary for conservation work. Although beyond the scope of our paper, researchers should also examine how pervasive the issue of trust is in volunteer tourism (e.g., use of money, project goals, project future).

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[8] Managers also may be able to adjust projects to satisfy some push motivations (e.g., creating projects that allow volunteers to meet other people or experience cultural immersion), but in most cases managers will not be able to directly motivate individuals to volunteer abroad.

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