



## Analyze The Role of User Generated Content (UGC) In Shaping Tourists Decisions Making

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### ABSTRACT

This study investigated at how individuals apply multi-functional social media content apps and how user-generated travel posts influence their travel decisions in light of the growing popularity and adaptability of mobile applications. The primary objective of this study is to look into how user-generated content (UGC), which Internet users passively view, affects, or the intention to choose a destination for travel. The intention of this study is to evaluate how online users communicate on platforms and websites that host user-generated content, as well as how user-generated content affects trip planning decisions and information collecting. Both academics and practitioners agree on the significance of the Internet in the process of image formation. Despite the rise in the usage of user-generated electronic content as a tourist information source, its impact on the creation of destination images is still not completely understood. We did an empirical study to investigate the role of online user produced reviews on the two dimensions of destination image: emotional and cognitive, in order to fill this knowledge gap in tourism management. An online survey had been used for organizing the empirical research, and 171 respondents' data were tested using method of ANOVA test. The findings of this study go beyond earlier research by illuminating the impact of user-generated content on the perception of a tourist location.

*Keywords: user-generated content, online reviews, tourist location, image formation, booking platforms, destination decisions, information gathering*

### 1. Introduction

One of the industries that most significantly contribute to a nation's economic development is tourism. It helps society by generating cash and jobs, as well as by enhancing numerous associated sectors. According to the UNWTO (2018), tourism is an industry that generates 10% of the global GDP and is becoming more and more competitive. Prior to the 2019 Covid-19

coronavirus illness outbreak, tourism was one of the most quickly expanding economic sectors in the globe. According to the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), 2018 it contributed 10% of the global gross domestic product (GDP), 30% of service exports, and 1 in every 11 employment. In addition, tourism is strongly linked to other industries, including transportation, agriculture, handicrafts, and so on, making it a crucial pillar of economic growth on both a national and international scale. An intense interest in the study of user-generated content has been prompted by the appearance and popularity of social media. According to Daugherty, Eastin, and Bright (2008), user-generated content refers to information or content created by the general public and distributed online. According to Xiang & Gretzel (2010), one of the industries most impacted by user-generated content is the travel and tourism sector. While companies are aware of the value of consumer reviews for quality enhancement, a thorough grasp of user-generated content is still difficult to come by (Chu, Deng, & Cheng, 2020). Prior study has looked at the characteristics of user-generated content on review websites, such as review length, review breadth, and review valence, to see if these characteristics affect readers' perception and intention (Leung, 2021). However, it is still questionable how various social media content or characteristic kinds may affect the behavior of decisions of visitors (Büschken & Allenby, 2016). Additionally, in the past ten years, in the era of the mobile Internet, e-word-of-mouth has transitioned from computer-based to mobile-based formats (Jia & Wu, 2019). Smartphone and tablet applications (apps) are replacing computer-based websites as the primary method for obtaining travel-related information, particularly among younger generations (Shi, Fan, & Cai, 2020). Additionally, as smartphone apps have grown in popularity, not only are there travel-related apps like Trip Advisor but also numerous multi-functional social media and content apps (referred to as "integrated social apps") that have become well-liked venues for people to share their travel experiences. Examples of these social media connections include Facebook, YouTube, and Instagram. All of these platforms are mobile-friendly and increase the variety of information sources available to travellers (Sotiriadis & Van Zyl, 2013). Travel activity and decision-making are also intricate, involving many phases including pre-trip and choice categories (such as destination selection, lodging, and meals). The user-generated material provided via integrated social applications frequently stimulates individuals to take vacations, in contrast to travel-oriented apps, which primarily give users information for travel planning (Gretzel, 2021). This study examines a novel platform travel posts on integrated social apps to further our understanding of how user-generated material affects choices regarding travel.

In this study, we first examine the role of User generated content (UGC) for taking tourists decision making regarding destination place. Second, to identify which is the most crucial factor based on user perception when choosing an enjoyable destination? Third, to identifying how do tourists feel that booking and reviews websites have an impact on how they plan their travels? We first evaluate the literature and develop a set of objectives, and then we discuss the methodology and give the findings. We conclude with the findings and insights we have drawn from this study.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1 Decision-making and information requirements of tourists**

The process of gathering and evaluating information to choose the best option from a list of possibilities is known as decision-making (Chen, 1998). Pre-trip, during the trip, and post-trip decision-making can all be categorized as travel-related (Chen, 1998; CoX, Burgess, Sellitto, & Bultjens, 2009). While tourism products are difficult, fuzzy, and sometimes seen as highly dangerous without prior expertise, tourists always want information for their decision-making (Fodness & Murray, 1999). At this point, the main focus of information search is general information about probable destinations and activities (Pabel & PrideauX, 2016). Pearce and Packer (2013) explained how people read reviews and choose destinations in different ways using the case of TripAdvisor, either through a logical choice-elimination process or an emotion-based heuristic method. According to many sources, information search during the decision-making process can be further classified into internal and external categories (Gursoy & Umbreit, 2004). External search refers to collections of information from the marketplace, such as travel agents and the Internet (Gursoy & Umbreit, 2004), whereas internal search focuses on prior experiences and knowledge of tourist items or places (Fodness & Murray, 1999).

### **2.2 User-generated content (UGC) and tourist's conclusion**

Consumers are increasingly sharing their thoughts and experiences regarding goods and services via electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) (Rezabakhsh et al., 2006; Mendes, Tan & Mills, 2012). On the Internet, there is a wealth of information about entertainment as well as reviews of various goods and services, including hotels, restaurants, and literature (George & Scerri, 2007). According to Navo-Marco et al. (2018), the most significant advancement in Internet applications over the past few years has been the advent of peer-to-peer apps and user-generated

content, or Web 2.0. The most popular information sources for travellers have also evolved to include user-generated content (Sotiriadis & Van Zyl, 2013). People's initial assessments of tourism products and subsequent purchasing decisions are greatly influenced by content created by users because it is typically regarded as genuine, authentic, and reliable (Xiang & Gretzel, 2010).

### **2.3 The role of Mobile Apps for selecting tourist's destination**

According to the World Tourism and Travel Council (2019), 83% of all travellers bring their mobile devices with them on their trip, making mobile technology and applications a necessary component of contemporary travel. Travellers can look up and exchange information whenever and wherever they choose thanks to mobile devices and convenient mobile broadband services like 4G and Wi-Fi. People can post content about their travel experiences using simple mobile apps as well (World Bank Group, 2018). According to study, nearly half of all travellers prefer to explore and organize their stay in a new destination only through a mobile device (Think with Google, 2018). In India, mobile devices are widely used. According to statistics, smartphone penetration in India has surpassed 43% and is anticipated to reach 69% by 2023 (Statista, 2019). Smartphones, as the most modern information and communication technology device, have contributed to significant changes in travellers' travel patterns (Thomas, Geurs, Koolwaaij, & Bijlsma, 2018).

### **2.4 Research objectives**

1. To study the role of User generated content (UGC) for taking tourists decision making regarding destination place.
2. To identify which is the most crucial factor based on user perception when choosing an enjoyable destination.

## **3. Research Methodology**

### **Collection of Data & Sampling**

Due to the lack of an appropriate sample frame, this study used a non-probabilistic, purposive sampling technique to attain excellent data quality and credibility. Although non-probabilistic

sampling has limitations in empirical generalizations, purposive sampling involves individuals who have certain characteristics that allow for a deep grasp of the primary issues that the researcher desires to explore (Ritchie and Lewis 2003). Given that the goal of this study is to investigate the effects of user-generated material on potential travellers' destination selection intentions in the Himachal tourist market, it was determined that participants must match the following criteria: (1) Be a Himachal resident; (2) be above the age of 18; and (3) use at least one Web 2.0 application that allows user produced content to be published and exchanged. Between May 2023 to July 2023, an online survey was conducted, with 171 responds collected. The online self-administered questionnaire was produced with Google Forms and distributed across user generated content platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and We Chat, ensuring that all respondents are users of at least one user generated platform. The final questionnaire included a total of 20 questions, the majority of which were closed-ended. All items were evaluated on a five point Likert scale, with 1 representing strongly disagreed with, 2 representing disagreed with, 3 representing neutral, 4 representing agree with, and 5 representing strongly agree with. The demographics a portion asks participants about their gender, age, marital status, monthly income, level of education, number of hours per day spent browsing the internet for reviews and ratings, and their use of platforms for user-generated content. For statistical analysis, IBM SPSS version 22 software was applied. Paired samples, and ANOVA tests, were performed.

## Results

Table 1 | Demographic information about the respondents

Variables	Type/ category	Frequency	Percent (%)
Gender	Male	73	42.7
	Female	98	57.3
Age	19 years	18	10.5
	20-25 years	51	29.8
	26-30 years	40	23.4
	31 and above	62	36.4
	High School	94	55.0
	Bachelor Degree	25	14.6

Education	Master's Degree	48	28.1
	Ph.D. or higher	04	2.3
Income Annually	Less than 3 Lakhs	78	45.6
	3 to 4 Lakhs	53	31.0
	More than 4 Lakhs	40	23.4

Source: Authors' research

As shown in Table 1's findings, female made up the majority of respondents, representing 57.3 percent of the population overall, while male made up 42.7 percent of the population. Secondly, majority of the respondents falls under the age category of 31 years and above were more and less the age of 19 years. Thirdly, majority of the respondent's falls under the variable education high school respondents were more and Ph.D. or higher respondents were very less. Apart from this, majority of the respondents have an annual income of less than 3 Lakhs, followed by 3 lakhs to 4 lakhs category with a share percentage of 45.6 and lastly 40 respondents have annual income of more than 4 lakhs per year.

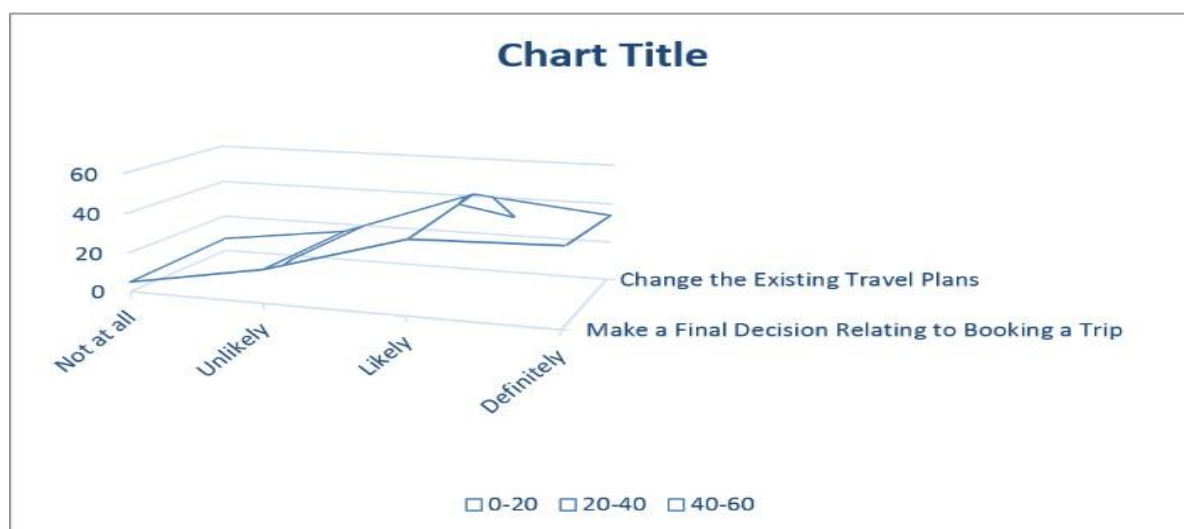
**RO: 1.The Role of User generated content (UGC) for taking tourists decision making regarding destination place.**

The analysis of the literature makes it abundantly clear that tourists frequently visit user-generated content. Therefore, in order to determine how much these sites influence travelers' travel plans, we asked a few additional questions of the respondents.

I) How probable is it that user-generated content (UGC) will have an impact on your decision to book a trip or another travel-related item?

II) How probable is it that the influence of user-generated content will force you to make changes to your current travel plans?

Fig. 1 demonstrates how User generated content platforms affect tourists actual travel decisions.



Source: Authors' research

Figure 1's findings revealed that whereas 37.75% of respondents' final decisions regarding their trips would probably be influenced by user-generated content sites, 39.80% of respondents' final decisions would unquestionably be influenced by these sites. Additionally, 22.45% of respondents said that the user-generated content had no influence on their choice of travel destination. In addition, 41.84% of respondents said they were likely to change their trip plans as a result of the influence of user-generated content websites, and 34.70% said they were certain to change their plans as a result of the information provided by these websites. In contrast, 23.47% of the respondents said that they would not alter their current travel plans as a result of the user-generated content information.

## **RO: 2.To identify which is the most crucial factor based on user perception when choosing an enjoyable destination**

To determine whether there is a statistically significant difference in the perceived importance of each element in Table 2 measurements, the ANOVA test is applied

ANOVA test is measured in Table 2. According to tourists' perceptions, the most crucial factor to consider while deciding a destination place

	age of respondent	Recommendation by friend's & Relatives(1)	Reviews of other tourists(2)	Based on Rating & Social Media Platforms(3)	Promotions(4)
N Valid	171	171	171	171	171
Missing	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Mean</b>	<b>1.7661</b>	<b>4.1462</b>	<b>3.8070</b>	<b>3.8187</b>	<b>3.8012</b>
Std. Error of Mean	.05459	.06874	.08055	.07767	.06871
Median	2.0000	4.0000	4.0000	4.0000	4.0000
Mode	2.00	5.00	5.00	4.00	4.00
Std. Deviation	.71391	.89884	1.05337	1.01570	.89849
Variance	.510	.808	1.110	1.032	.807
Range	3.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	3.00
Minimum	1.00	2.00	1.00	1.00	2.00
Maximum	4.00	6.00	5.00	5.00	5.00
Sum	302.00	709.00	651.00	653.00	650.00

Source: Authors' research

Comparison between each element, shows that all elements are statistically different from each other ( $p < 0.05$ ), except element 2(Reviews of other tourists) and element 4(Promotions). In other words, the most significant elements is Based on Rating & Social Media Platforms, follows by Recommendation by friend's & Relatives, therefore Interestingly enough, user generated content in the form of Based on Rating & Social Media Platforms significant factor than all other factors..

Pairwise comparisons in Table 3 Differentiations between the most crucial factors when selecting a destination place according to tourists perspective

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	
Recommendation by friend's & Relatives	Between Groups	2.711	3	.904	1.121	.002
	Within Groups	134.634	167	.806		
	Total	137.345	170			
Reviews of other tourists	Between Groups	2.483	3	.828	.743	.528
	Within Groups	186.148	167	1.115		
	Total	188.632	170			
Based on Rating & Social Media Platforms	Between Groups	1.262	3	.421	.404	.001
	Within Groups	174.118	167	1.043		
	Total	175.380	170			
Promotions	Between Groups	2.036	3	.679	.838	.475



Within Groups	135.203	167	.810		
Total	137.240	170			

Source: Authors' research

## Discussions

User-generated content about travel has become increasingly common on social networking sites during the past few years. However, even when people aren't searching for that stuff as regularly, they are still seeing it frequently. They might become interested in the location if you provide that kind of things. On the other hand, when people are already interested in a destination or tourism-related items but want to learn more about them, they search more frequently for content created by users on websites. User-generated content on social networking sites, particularly Facebook, is completely different from that on review and booking sites. Although heritage sites are not the primary focus of this study, the results are comparable. Bari2i (2017) offered very similar conclusions, but it went further to evaluate different user-generated content channels, such Facebook and YouTube, for influencing tourists' decisions regarding which place they should visit. According to this study the most crucial factors was when selecting a destination place according to tourists perspective was based on rating & social media platforms, followed by recommendation by friend's & relatives.

## Practical implications of the study

The results of this study provide useful recommendations for travel destinations for tourists, marketers and managers. First, this study demonstrated that passive exposure to travel-related user-generated information had a significant impact on potential tourists' destination visit desire and intention to choose a trip destination. Second, this study shows that passive exposure to user-generated content about travel has a considerable impact on attitudes about visiting a certain travel destination, which in turn has an impact on the intention to choose that place. The association between passive access to user-generated content about travel and intention to choose a trip location is also mediated by attitude towards visiting a certain travel destination. Last but not least, destination image is still crucial even though it has not been demonstrated to be connected to passive access to travel-related user-generated content. This indicates that a person's decision to purchase travel is significantly influenced by their perception of the location.

## **Conclusion**

User-generated tourism content has become highly popular over the past few years on social media platforms. However, even when people aren't searching for that stuff as regularly, they are still seeing it frequently. They might become interested in the location if you provide that kind of stuff. In contrast, people search more frequently for user-generated content on platforms when they are already interested in the destination or tourism-related products but want to learn more about them. User-generated information on social media sites, particularly Facebook, is completely different from that on search engines and review sites. Many nations rely substantially on tourism, which contributes significantly to their annual income. One of those nations is India, which also has enterprises that cater to tourists. Because it demonstrates the most crucial factors for choosing a holiday location based on user perception as well as users' perceptions of the influence of user-generated content rich platforms, this research has given tourism-oriented firms useful insights. Participants in this survey attest that social media and rating Platforms are the most essential factor in selecting a destination, while user-generated content and recommendations from friends and family are the next most critical factors. The opinions of their friends and promotional content are less trusted by respondents than user-generated content. The conclusion is that user-generated content plays a crucial part in tourists' purchasing decisions, especially if the pricing is in line with needs and tastes. It not only sparks interest in a holiday location. These findings demonstrate the significance of platforms based on user created content and its direct effects on travelers and their decision-making processes. As a result, they are beneficial to both tourists and the tourism sector as well as to researchers.

## **Limitations and future research scope**

Future studies are necessary to validate the findings because the current work has a number of limitations. Firstly, among the limitations are the sample distribution and sampling method. The results' generalizability is constrained by the non-probability sampling methodology. Secondly, sample is based on a limited area, which may restrict the generalizability of the findings. Thirdly, as sample size is not large, so statistical results cannot generalize and respondents who do not make travel planning decisions using user-generated content are not included in this study.

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