

Destination Image Formation through User Generated Content (UGC). An updated Literature Review

Asfandiyar Khan^{1*}, Javeria Ashfaq², Muhammad Bilal³, Muhammad Hashim Khan⁴, Fazaila Shad⁵

¹ PhD Scholar at Azman Hashim International Business School (AHIBS), Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM).

² Lecturer at Department of Mass Communication, National University of Modern Languages (NUML Rawalpindi).

³ Lecturer at Institute of Management Studies (IMS), University of Peshawar.

⁴ Lecturer at Institute of Management Studies (IMS), University of Peshawar.

⁵ PhD Scholar at Islamia College Peshawar

Correspondence to *Asfandiyar Khan, kasfandiyar@graduate.utm.my

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Abstract: This paper is a humble effort on bringing together the ideas and research findings of different intellectuals and researchers with respect to formation of destination image. Special emphasis is put on the role of the internet, specifically User Generated Content (UGC), in formation of destination image. This paper uses review of literature from various sources that are relevant to the subject of study. The literature is selected based on the availability, language (English), accessibility, and relevancy to the topic. The rise in use of User Generated Content (UGC) platforms as source of information is influential in formation of destination image. This phenomenon has gained attention from research communities, leading to the use of numerous research methods to study the relationship between User Generated Content (UGC) and destination image. The research is limited to certain literature from a limited database. Exhaustive literature review would lead to more concrete idea of the trend flowing from the role of conventional destination image formation agents to the role of User Generated Content (UGC) in the formation of a destination image. The importance of User Generated Content (UGC) in formation of destination image can be realized by various stakeholders of tourism. The list of qualitative and quantitative research methods along with the tools applied to study the phenomenon enables the researcher in comparing and deciding about appropriate research method and tools for further research.”

Keywords: “Destination Image, User Generated Content (UGC), Research Methods, Literature Review”

Introduction

“Destination image has been discussed by tourism researchers since 1970s, and is one of the most widely discussed subjects (Etchner & Ritchie, 2003).” Destination image plays a very important role in tourism, as it influences perception about the destination, behavior towards the destination and selection of the destination for tourism purposes (Chon, 1990; Baloglu & McCleary 1999; Chon 1992; Etchner and Ritchie 1991). Destinations are competing, based on the image perceived by people about the destination (Baloglu & Mangalolu, 2001). From this, it logically follows that effectively

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positioning a destination is a major thrust in tourism marketing. It also logically follows that to effectively position a destination, it is necessary to know the different sources of information that tourists consider relevant to form perception regarding a destination. “The User Generated Content plays very important role especially in the field of tourism (Pan, MacLaurin & Crofts, 2007; Litvin, Goldsmith, & Pan, 2008; Akehurst, 2009; Yoo & Gretzel, 2011), from information search to the travel planning process (Cox, Burgess, Sellito, & Buultjens, 2009; Xiang & Gretzel, 2010)” by sharing experiences related to destination, property, facilities etc. (Litvin & Hoffman, 2012). User generated travel blogs serve as a rich and varied stream of travel and tourism information (Akehurst, 2009) and is considered more authentic and independent (Hofstaetter and Egger, 2009). Similar to conventional studies of destination image based on destination attributes, researchers have studied destination image based on the destination attributes as discussed on travel blogs (Choi, Lehto & Morrison, 2007; Jani & Hwang 2011, Kladou & Mavragani 2015).

Destination Image

“In 1975, Hunt described destination image as the impressions that a person or persons hold about a state in which they do not reside. Destination image is described as thoughts and feelings towards a destination (Beerli & Martin, 2004). It is the subjective interpretation of reality by the tourist (Bigné, Sanchez & Sacher 2001). Some of the definitions given by prominent researchers are as follows:”

Reference	Definition of destination image
Hunt (1975)	"Perceptions held by potential visitors about an area"
Lawson and Baud Bovy (1977)	"The expression of all objective knowledge, impressions, prejudice, imaginations, and emotional thoughts an individual or group might have of a particular place."
Crompton (1979)	"Sum of all beliefs, ideas and impressions that people associate with a destination."
Phelps (1986)	"Perceptions or impressions of a place"
Gartner & Hunt (1987)	"Impressions that a person ...holds about a state in which they do not reside"
Richardson & Crompton (1988)	"Perceptions of vacation attributes"
Gartner (1989)	"A complex combination of various products and associated attributes"
Calantone, Benedetto, Hakam, &Bojanic, (1989)	"Perceptions of potential tourist destinations"
Echtner and Ritchie (1993)	"Not only the perceptions of individual destination attributes but also the holistic impression made by the destination"
Cai (2002)	"Perceptions about the place as reflected by the associations held in tourist memory"
Hosany, Ekinici, &Uysal (2007)	"Destination image is a multidimensional construct comprising of two primary dimensions: cognitive and affective".

Choi, Lehto, & Morrison (2007)	“a compilation of beliefs and impressions based on information processing from a variety of sources over time,”
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“There are many definitions of destination image. However, most frequently, destination image is described as a compilation of ideas, beliefs, perception and impressions about a destination (Crompton, 1979; Gartner, 1994; Gallarza et al., 2002; Etchner & Ritchie 2003).”

Moreover, visitors will be more likely to recommend a destination if their destination image is favorable (Chen & Tsai, 2007). According to Sonmez & Sirakaya (2002) destination image determines the success or failure of the tourism industry. The destination image can influence the destination selection process, tourist’s pre-visit perception about the destination, evaluation of the destination during the trip, and intentions to revisit (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999).

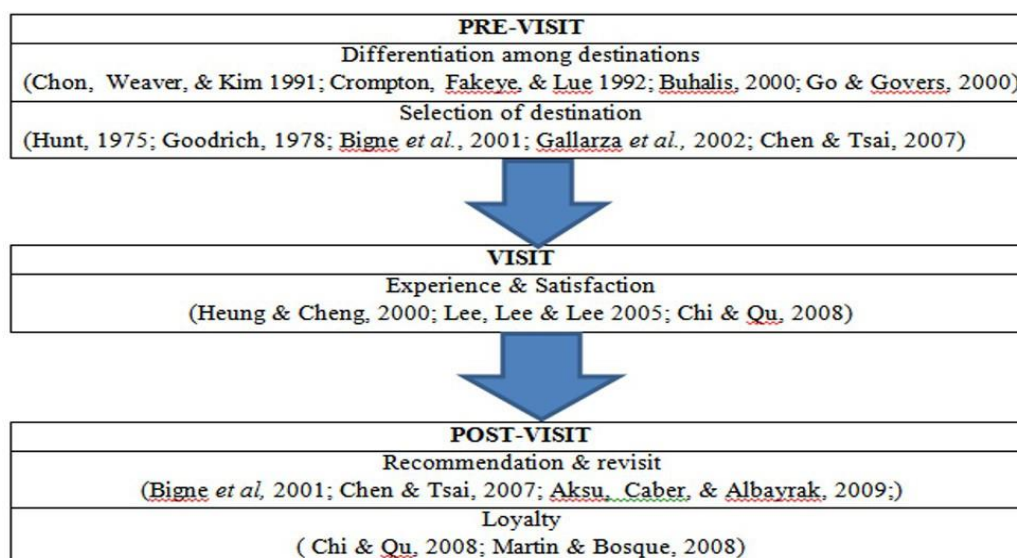


Fig. 1: Influence of Destination Image in Various Stages of Travel (Adapted from No & Kim, 2015)

According to Reza Jalilvand and Samiei, (2012) the image about the destination can be developed based on the understanding/estimation of the attributes of a destination. The attributes can be classified into cognitive-affective such as used in the study by Beerli and Martin (2004). They have tried to study the impact of cognitive, affective and motivating components in developing destination image. The importance of cognitive and affective image to measure the destination image has been realized by various researchers (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999; Beerli & Martin, 2004; Pike & Ryan, 2004). Further, Conative component enables one to understand the actions of a tourist (Gartner, 1994), and refers to how people act on the information (Konecnik & Gartner, 2007). According to Gartner (1994) the three components are “hierarchically interrelated components: cognitive, affective and conative”. The cognitive-affective-conative model is widely used to measure destination image (Pike & Ryan, 2004; Martin & Bosque, 2008; Zhou, 2014; Kladou et al., 2015).

Source of Information and Destination Image Formation

“Source of information can influence tourist’s choice of destination, behavioral intentions and travel decisions (Mayo, 1973; Woodside and Lysonski, 1989; Um and Crompton, 1990; Sirakaya and

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Woodside, 2005). According to Gunn (1972) the destination image is highly depended on the sources of information which can be classified as:"

- a) "Organic image which is formed over time from various sources such as documentaries, geography books, novels, radio, and newspaper by people living at a tourist destination, which do not have any vested interest in marketing the destination".
- b) "Induced image is developed by induced sources such as posters, promotional videos, travel brochures, advertisements and even through internet with the intent to market a destination".

Further Gartner (1994) argues that a single destination image is formed by various sources of information. Such as,

- a) "Overt Induced I information sources: These are the traditional forms of promoting a place in the mass media by stakeholders of destination tourism".
- b) "Overt Induced II information sources: These are those promotions done through materials from various travel agents, tour operators etc".
- c) "Covert Induced I information sources: These are the recommendations & promotions of a destination by celebrities and other public figures".
- d) "Covert Induced II information sources: These are the information sources which are unbiased, unsponsored and have no vested interest in promoting a destination such as unsponsored travel writing".
- e) "Autonomous information sources: These are independent destination related news, documentaries, movies etc. They are considered by Gartner to be highly credible and having the potential to change image of a destination within a short span of time".
- f) "Unsolicited Organic information sources. These are volunteered information about a destination based on knowledge or experience about the destination".
- g) "Solicited Organic information sources: These are also termed as 'word of mouth'. It is the requested information from people with no vested interest in promoting travel to a destination and mainly consists of friends and relatives".
- h) "Organic information source. This has the highest credibility among the information sources and is acquired by visiting the destination".

Fodness & Murray (1997) classified the sources of information as follows:

- a) "Commercial impersonal information sources such as brochures, guide books etc".
- b) "Commercial personal information sources such as auto clubs, travel agents etc".
- c) "Non-commercial impersonal information sources such as Magazines, newspapers etc".
- d) "Non-commercial personal information sources such as friends, relatives, personal experience".

Internet as a source of Information

Tourism services are intangible and cannot be experienced before consumption (Lewis &

Chambers 2000). Thus, tourists try to reduce uncertainty about destination by seeking information about the destination (Fondness & Murray, 1997). Buhalis (1998) pointed out that tourism is one of the sectors having a very close relationship with new information and communication technologies. Internet has become an important source of information for tourists (Grusoy & McCleary, 2004). It influences tourist behavior (Buhalis & Law, 2008; No & Kim, 2015), choice of destination (Chung & Buhalis, 2008) and duration of stay (Luo, Feng & Cai, 2005). “By the year 2014, the total number of internet users in the world reached 3 billion i.e., 40% of the world population has internet connection compared to 1% in 1995.” According to No & Kim (2015), “six in 10 of those 15 years of age or older tend to search for travel information using the Internet”.

Table 2: Sources of Online Tourism Information (Adapted from No & Kim, 2015)

Sources of online tourism information	References
Public websites where local or national government provides tourism related information. For example: sikkimtourism.gov.in , incredibleindia.org	Kaplanidou & Vogt, 2006; Law & Hsu, 2006
Company websites where tourism companies provide tourism information. For example: tripadvisor.com , yatra.com	Law & Hsu, 2006
Travel blogs where travellers share their experiences, photos and videos related to the tour. For example- travelblog.com , tripadvisor.com	Cai & Jun, 2003; Pan, MacLaurin, & Crotts, 2007
Social networking websites where people create, share and exchange tourism information. For example- Facebook, YouTube, twitter	Xiang & Gretzel, 2010

In the study by No & Kim (2015), five attributes of the above online tourism information sources were identified: accessibility, security, information-trust, interaction, and personalization. They have also emphasized that travel blogs are at the highest in the four attributes i.e., accessibility, information-trust, interaction, and personalization. In case of security, though travel blog is lacking behind public websites and company websites; people don't regard security as an important factor in the case of blogs or social media websites (No & Kim, 2015).

User Generated Content

Back in the year 1989, Tim Burners-Lee introduced Web 1.0, the first generation of the web which is read-only web. The Web 1.0 was non-interactive source of information for the user. In the year 2004, Dale Dougherty defined Web 2.0 as a read-write web. This means that Web 2.0 transformed users from mere information seeker to information contributor. Web 2.0 applications allowed users to submit, review and respond to online content, due to which it is, also known as User Generated Content (UGC) (Fernando, 2007; Cox et al., 2009). According to Christodoulides, Jevons, & Bonhomme (2012) User Generated Content (UGC) are “consumers creating content that is made available through publicly accessible transmission media such as the internet; reflects some degree of creative effort; and is created for free outside professional routines and practices”. Choi, Lehto &

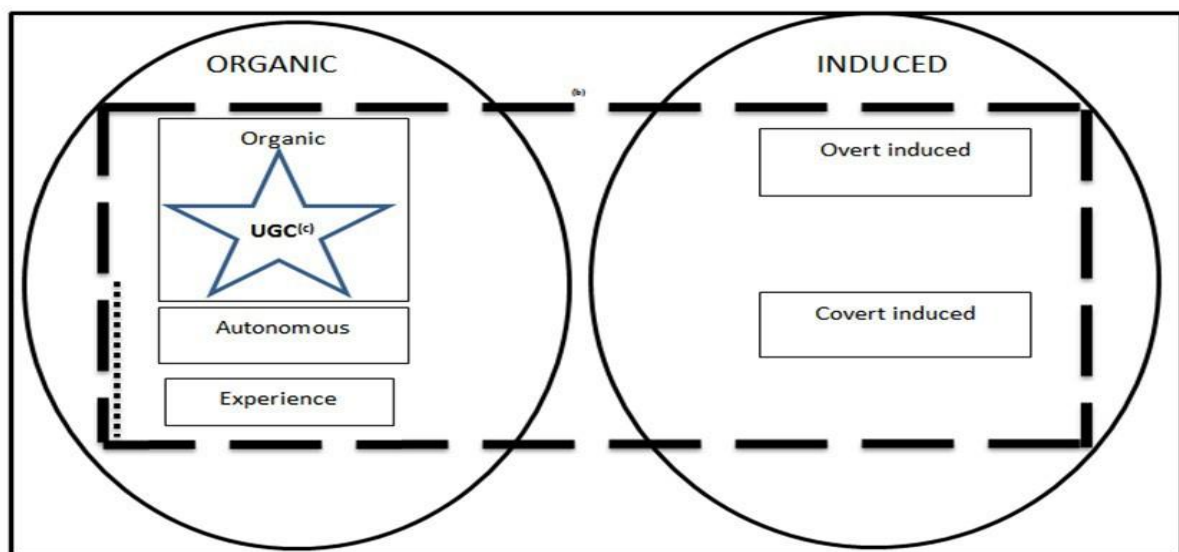
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Morrison (2007) defines User Generated Content (UGC) as “any form of content such as blogs, wikis, discussion forums, posts, chats, tweets, podcasting, pins, digital images, video, audio files, and other forms of media that was created by users of an online system or service, often made available via social media websites”.

“According to HaighBrubaker, & Whiteside, (2013) UGC includes blogs, Wikipedia entries, posted videos and photographs, and micro-blog posts on platforms (e.g., Facebook, Twitter etc.). Kaplan & Haelein (2010) has classified UGC in six categories: (a) blogs, (b) social networking sites (e.g., Facebook), (c) virtual social worlds (e.g., Second Life), (d) collaborative projects (e.g., Wikipedia), (e) content communities (e.g., YouTube), (f) and virtual game worlds (e.g., Clash of Clan).”

User Generated Content and Tourism

“UGC has increased awareness regarding people, place, event and tourism imaginaries (Salazar, 2007). The digital content provided by the tourists has increasingly influenced destination awareness and image creation (Tussyadiah & Fesenmaier, 2009).”



(a) Gunn, 1979 (b) Gartner 1994 (c) Llodrà-Riera, Martínez-Ruiz, Jiménez-Zarco, & Izquierdo-Yusta (2015)

Pan et al., (2007) states that, “Travel blogs are an inexpensive means to gather rich, authentic, and unsolicited customer feedback. Information technology advances and increasingly large number of travel blogs facilitate travel blog monitoring as a cost-effective method for destination marketers to assess their service quality and improve travelers’ overall experiences.” “Mack, Blose, & Bing Pan, (2008) recognized that, consumers don’t perceive the credibility of blogs as equivalent with traditional word-of-mouth but some people equate blogs with traditional word-of-mouth for authoritativeness.” Litvin et al., (2008) suggested a framework of using the potentiality of electronic Word-of-Mouth (e-WOM) for popularizing tourism & hospitality based on literature review. According to the study by Burgess et al., (2009), the real experience of real people makes UGC trustworthy but there may be fake

posts by people with vested interests so untrustworthy issue also remains.

“Addressing the membership behavior of travel bloggers, Vrana & Zafiroopoulos (2010) conclude that the common characteristics of travelers lead to group membership. The most active and information providing travelers form the core groups of central traveller. Luo & Zhong (2015) also found that existing social relationships influence Electronic Word of Mouth (eWOM) communication related to travel. (eWOM) can transmit information and influence decision making. Lee & Hyun, (2015) also analyzed these relationships and concluded that, peer communication in online travel communities increases user satisfaction, which further leads to follow online travel advice.”

“Wang (2012) suggests that blogger’s perception of destination image is influenced by factors of affective & cognitive image and interpersonal communication. The perception further influences travel intention. On investigating travel reviews, Kladou & Mavragani (2015) found that all the reviews do not necessarily cover all the three components of destination image i.e., cognitive, affective and conative. The cognitive component is mostly covered in reviews. In comparison to men, women provide more ‘negative and positive’ comments. Men’s negative comment mostly revolved around noisy, busy & crowded city. Muñoz-Leiva, Hernández-ON usability, Méndez, & Sánchez-Fernández, (2012) suggest that a negative relationship has been identified between ease of use and intention to use travel blogs. Trust on the UGC determines the usefulness of the UGC for preparing trips, except in case of blogs. According to Zehrer et al., (2011), blog users consider blog posting as useful. A positive counter reaction can negate the negativity of negative posting. By performing content analysis of 214 posts, Jani & Hwang (2011) reveals that negative information are sought by tourists to simplify their decision-making process. Chung, Lee, & Han, (2015) found that positive influence of user’s perception of formal communication is seen on specialization, credibility and coordination of social media and positive influence of informal communication is seen on credibility and coordination.”

“On the content creation, Yoo & Gretzel, (2011) informs that traveler’s personality influences content creation of Customer Generated Media. “Perceived esthetics, narrative structure and self-reference are the key elements of a storytelling blog, and these elements influence intention indirectly through empathy and attitude.” (Hsiao et al., 2012). Further, a significant relationship has been identified by Reza Jalilvand and Samiei, (2012) between the attitude towards a destination, subjective norms, behavioral intention and online word of mouth. Also, Abubakar & Ilkan (2016) found that Online-WOM positively influences destination trust and intention to travel. Reza Jalilvand et al., (2012) discovered a positive influence of electronic word of mouth on destination image, attitude of tourists and intentions to travel.

“According to Bizirgianni & Dionysopoulou (2013), while planning trip, Internet is the first option followed by tourist agencies and past experience, television and radio, Tourism Fairs and Embassies and Consulates are last option as information source. The discounts, offers and promotions by tour operators in social media influenced young tourists. Xiang & Gretzel (2010) focused specifically on social media and found that the search engine leads to social media sites. The importance of social media on tourism domain is increasing and traditional information sources are facing challenges. Sotiriadis & Van Zyl (2013) presented a conceptual framework of experience sharing and reviews recommendations incorporated with motivations, media and influential factors. The most influential factor is identified as source reliability followed by source expertise and knowledge. Chung & Koo (2015) found that information, reliability, enjoyment as well as complexity and perceived effort

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influence the users of social media. However, Chen, Shang, & Li, (2014) suggests that reliability of content does not affect blog usage enjoyment. Relevancy of information, understandability, novelty and interesting blog content affects behavioral intention.”

“Del Chiappa, Lorenzo-Romero and Constantinides, (2014) suggest that segmentation of UGC users are possible based on various socio-demographic variable and their behavioral intentions are based on these segmentation. Further, Akgün, Keskin, Ayar, & Erdoğan, (2015) reveals that emotional response and behavioral intentions toward a destination has positive relation with empathy, and empathy can be evoked by perceived esthetics, narrative structure, and self-reference. In their study, Bosangit, Hibbert, & McCabe, (2015) found that tour experiences are more accounted in travel blogs than facts. People express all types of emotions in blogs.

“Stepchenkova & Zhan (2013) suggest that the interest of travelers on the attributes can vary from the attributes promoted by Destination Marketing Organizations. Based on literature review, Burgess, Sellitto, Cox, & Buultjens, (2014) suggested a strategic framework developed for the use of Consumer-generated media (CGM) by small business of tourism industry. Further, Kavoura & Stavrianea (2015) found that integration of user generated content is beneficial for tourism stakeholders. However, Baka (2016) strongly suggests that User Generated Content (UGC) needs to be continuously monitored by the hoteliers. Reputation management is depended on UGC. Sparks, Perkins, & Buckley (2013) suggest that belief in the utility and trust in customer reviews about the resort and overall trust in resort influences consumer attitude towards a resort.

“According to Ye, Law, & Gu, (2009), online user reviews influence online hotel bookings. Ye, Law, Gu, & Chen, (2011) reveals that “Valence of traveler reviews had a significant impact on the online sales of hotel rooms.” Further, Bilgihan, Barreda, Okumus, & Nusair, (2016) suggest that the perceived ease of use of the websites influences the utilitarian beliefs, subjective norms, belief in integrity and the intention to share knowledge. The content of organization is shared by the user, when they trust the organization.”

Research Methods used to study User Generated Destination Image

“To study the relationship between tourism and UGC various kinds of research methods have been used. Some of the prominent research methods used are given in table 3.”

Table 3: Research Methods used to Study User Generated Platform & Tourism

Authors	Research Method
Pan <i>et al.</i> , (2007)	Semantic network analysis and content analysis
Litvinet <i>et al.</i> , (2008)	Literature review
Mack, Blose, & Bing Pan, (2008)	Questionnaire & use of ANCOVA & MANCOVA
Burgess <i>et al.</i> , (2009)	Open ended questionnaires and analyzed in the qualitative software package XSight
Ye, Law, &Gu, (2009)	Web crawler to download web pages from Ctrip.com
Vrana & Zafiroopoulos (2010)	Analysis of social network links in Travepod

Xiang & Gretzel (2010)	Data mining & Content analysis and multivariate analysis
Jani& Hwang (2011)	Content analysis of 214 posts using TextSTAT
Piang, Hao, Yuan, Hu, Cai, & Zhang, (2011)	Travelogues mining and use Naive Query Expansion method, Query Expansion method and Query Expansion plus Annotation Refinement method
Ye, Law, Gu, & Chen, (2011)	Web crawler to download web pages from Ctrip.com
Yoo & Gretzel,(2011)	Online survey and descriptive analysis
Zehreret <i>al.</i> , (2011)	Narrative approach for blog analysis & use of Kruskale Wallis test
Hsiao, Lu &Lan (2013)	Travel blogs studied based on heuristic theory
Reza Jalilvand and Samiei, (2012)	Questionnaire & use of SEM & ANOVA
Kladou & Mavragani (2015)	Content analysis
Muñoz-Leiva, Hernández-Méndez, & Sánchez-Fernández, (2012)	Online questionnaire & Structure Equation Model
Nusair, Bilgihan, & Okumus, (2012)	Questionnaire & use of Confirmatory Factor Analysis, & Structural Equation modeling
Wang (2012)	Questionnaire & use of Confirmatory Factor Analysis
Bizirgianni & Dionysopoulou (2013)	Questionnaire & use of on-line software programme of statistical analysis www.kwiksurveys.com
Sparks, Perkins, & Buckley (2013)	Experimental method using simulated web-based content that included realistic photographs, review comments, and environmental logos, online survey software Qualtrics™, t-test, ANOVA
Sotiriadis & van Zyl (2013)	Questionnaire & use regression analysis & exploratory factor analysis
Stepchenkova & Zhan (2013)	Content analysis, Chi-square test, semiotic analysis & mapping
Chen, Shang, & Li, (2014)	Questionnaire & Confirmatory Factor Analysis with Partial Least Squares
(Del Chiappa, Lorenzo-Romero and Constantinides, (2014)	Questionnaire & Exploratory Factor Analysis
Akgün, Keskin, Ayar, & Erdoğan, (2015)	Questionnaire & use of Structural Equation Modeling
Bosangit, Hibbert, & McCabe, (2015)	Narrative approach for blog analysis
Burgess, Sellitto, Cox, & Buultjens, (2014)	Literature review
Chung, Lee, & Han, (2015)	Questionnaire & use of Confirmatory Factor analysis & Structural Equation Modeling
Chung & Koo (2015)	Questionnaire & use of Confirmatory Factor Analysis, & Structural Equation modeling

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Reza Jalilvand et al., (2012)	Questionnaire & use of SEM & ANOVA
Kavoura & Stavrianea (2015)	Questionnaire & descriptive statistics
Lee & Hyun, (2015)	Questionnaire & use of Confirmatory Factor Analysis, Structural Equation modeling, Multi-group analysis
Luo & Zhong (2015)	Questionnaire & whole-network analysis
Abubakar & Ilkan (2016)	Questionnaire & use of Confirmatory Factor Analysis, & Structural Equation modeling
Baka (2016)	Case study & netography
Bilgihan, Barreda, Okumus, & Nusair, (2016)	Questionnaire & use of Confirmatory Factor Analysis with Structural Equation Modeling

“From the above table it can be seen that the study related to UGC & tourism has mostly used quantitative techniques specially factor analysis with Structural Equation Modeling (SEM). On the other hand, use of various qualitative techniques can also be noticed. Some studies have also used combination of both qualitative and quantitative technique to study the relationship. Thus, it is yet to be understood as to which technique is most effective in understanding the relationship between UGC and tourism.

Discussions and Conclusion

“The findings from various literatures indicate the growing trend of tourists utilizing UGC platforms for various travel related issues. The inter-relation between tourism and UGC is drawing attention of research community. Researchers are studying various aspects of the relationship between tourism and UGC. In order to study the relationship between UGC & Tourism various research tools and techniques have been used. The research tools & techniques vary from traditional questionnaire, interview etc. to the use of modern software & web-based applications. Thus, indicating the desire of the research community to find an effective tool and technique that could study the phenomena.

“This paper discusses a shift from conventional way of measuring destination image; to the use of User Generated Content for understanding destination image. UGC is capable enough to influence pre-visit image, actual visit image and also post-visit image. Its importance cannot be ignored by academicians or Destination Management Organization. The findings of various studies on the influence of UGC on destination image, clearly reveals the necessity of various stakeholders of tourism to identify the potential of UGC and use them to stay ahead of competition.”

“Literature review has revealed that organic information sources like destination related news, documentaries, movies etc., and organic information sources like documentaries, geography books, novels, news prepared by people who do not have any vested interest in marketing the destination and living at a tourist destination are highly credible and have the potential to change image of a destination within a short span of time. Literature suggests that while planning a trip, internet is the first option for information search amongst the tourists. Internet has different forms of information sources, starting from advertisements to social media to travel blogs. Here we are looking out for a form of source that is created by people who do not have vested interest in marketing a destination. Literature revealed that people generally look for five attributes in an online information source to find it credible. These are accessibility, security, information- trust, interaction, and personalization. The same literature also suggested that travel blogs are at the highest in all of these attributes, except security. Travel blogs are followed by social networking sites. The importance of social media on tourism domain is increasing and traditional information sources are facing challenges. Both host User Generated Content (UGC) and thus are popular UGC platforms. So, it can be safely concluded that User Generated Content can influence formation of destination image among the tourists.”

“From the literature survey it can be understood that tourists are no longer mere consumers of the information provided by the destination marketers, rather tourists have become efficient, active and effective destination promoters. The reliability of people towards the information provided by the previous travelers to a destination, in comparison to the promotions done by other stake holders of destination, implies the gaining popularity of User Generated Destination Image over Conventional Destination Image. The strength of positive comments or reviews regarding the destination has positive impact on the destination image. Negative information is sought by tourists to simplify their decision-making process. So, the increase in negative comments or reviews can be very harmful for the destination image.

“On the other hand, the tourists are sharing their experiences, views, opinions and information regarding the destination without any biasness, which are regarded more reliable and truer compared to destination promotions by destination marketers. Hence, the destination marketers have no or very little influence on the destination image being created through User Generated Content. This shift in the creator of destination image can have severe consequences on the destination image altogether. Thus, there is a need to realize the potential of tourists in shaping the destination image. The destination marketers can only influence the User Generated Destination Image by influencing the user by enhancing the experiences of the tourists. Since negative review or comments spread faster than positive review or comments, it is high time for destination marketers to concentrate on each traveler’s expectation and attempt to provide satisfaction with the aspects of destination. This will enable destination promoters to minimize negative comments or reviews which will further have influence over decision making process of the tourist.”

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