Journal of Positive School Psychology http://journalppw.com
2022, Vol. 6, No. 6, 3645-3660

Trustworthiness Of User-Generated Content In Travel Planning Decisions Of Tourists

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Abstract

User-generated content (UGC) and its role in travel planning have become increasingly popular and essential. There is plenty of research focusing on the role of UGC in travel planning, and they confirm that UGC has an impact on the travel planning decisions of tourists. However, a few have pointed out whether tourists trust these UGC websites while making their travel decisions and how much they trust these websites. This study seeks to address these two issues. The data were collected from 111 respondents through an online questionnaire survey method and the sample of the study belong to four major cities of Madhya Pradesh (Bhopal, Gwalior, Indore and Jabalpur). Using quantitative analytics, researchers identified the three measures of trustworthiness of UGC, namely usefulness, reliability and credibility. There are some challenges to the study as it could only consider the three variables that are usefulness, reliability and credibility also it has not taken into account the income and education level of the respondents. The study has managerial implications by helping managers know the factors that can affect the UGC's trustworthiness as it plays an essential role in travel planning decisions. It also gives future research directions based on empirical evidence.

Keywords: User-generated content, Travel planning, Social Media, Trustworthiness, Credibility, Reliability

Introduction

Information communication technology has always been influencing the behaviour of consumers, primarily in the tourism industry. Travel industry is known to be one of the first industries to adopt online technologies for doing business (Fotis, Buhalis & Rossides, 2012). . There have been many advancements taking place in these information communication technologies and one of them is the Internet. The internet has revolutionised the entire process of developing, managing and marketing tourism products by facilitating the interaction between tourism organisations and the consumers. It has empowered the tourism consumers by giving them access to all type of information needed by them about the destination (Buhalis & Law, 2008) and has changed their behaviour dramatically (Buhalis & Law, 2008; Mills & Law, 2004). It has also challenged intermediaries' role by enabling consumers to get directly engaged with the suppliers (Buhalis & Law, 2008). Information communication technology has made travel planning easy and comfortable (Bagri & Babu, 2017). Now consumers can identify, customise and purchase their products from anywhere in the world. (Buhalis & O'connor, 2005). A study found that 70% of consumers indicated that they want to learn about products through online content (e.g. blogs and review sites) rather than through traditional advertising (Hollebeek & Macky, 2019).

Another advancement in information communication technology is web 2.0 that gave rise to social media platforms and facilitated information sharing by tourism consumers. Before web 2.0, the internet worked in 'read-only' format in which only one-way flow of information was allowed, and that was generally from organisations to the consumers (Hay, Page & Buhalis, 2013). Social media allows users to share their thoughts, feelings, opinions, and experiences in various formats such as textual, audio, video and picture, with others anytime

and anywhere. All this data shared by consumers in the various formats are called user-generated content.

Definition

There is no particular definition of user-generated content as of now. However, Buhalis and Law (2008) stated that user-generated content underpins social media and its prevalence. User-generated content encompasses all the terms used to describe online informal communications among individuals, whether in social media websites (Facebook, Instagram, Youtube), blogs, online review sites, travel forums and podcasts. Bakshi (2020) posited that user-generated content includes photos, videos, still-graphics, blogs, text-narration, hyperlinks and comments through which consumers share their perceptions and opinions. There are various terms used interchangeably for user-generated content such as social media, web 2.0, virtual communities and online interpersonal influence. User-generated content is part of big data that involves information from various sources such as genetic sequences, social media interactions, phone logs and other digital traces left by people (Boyd, Danah & Crawford, 2012; Lu & Stepchenkova, 2015).

Significance

Travel related information is the most searched content on the internet, and this trend is expected to increase in which user-generated content plays an essential role (Gretzel & Yoo, 2008). When it comes to tourism information gathering, the travel agents' information is not considered enough by the consumers, and they further search it online (Jeng & Fesenmaier, 2002). Social networking sites another form of user-generated content is getting popular among tourists (Ip, Lee & Law, 2010; Lo et.al., 2011). This popularity shows the importance of consumer opinion over the information provided by the travel companies (Litvin, Goldsmith & Pan, 2008). User-generated content plays a significant role in travel planning decisions of consumers, but at the same time, there are concerns about the lack of identity verification which may lead to manipulations by some service providers (Dellarocas, 2006; Ayeh, Au & Law, 2013). Many research have found that source of user-generated content have more influence on consumers' decision making as these sources are considered reliable in comparison to information provided by travel companies (Akehurst, 2009; Gretzel & Yoo, 2008; Del Chiappa et.al., 2015). Further, research has also found that source expertise and trustworthiness are positively associated with consumers' attitudes towards the product or service (Senecal & Nantel, 2004).

The geographic scope of the study

The study includes the respondents from the major cities of the Madhya Pradesh-Bhopal, Gwalior, Indore and Jabalpur. In 2019 approximately 88 million domestic and 0.33 million foreign tourist arrival were reported (India Brand Equity Foundation, 2020). Madhya Pradesh is a blend of nature, heritage, wildlife and spirituality. There are various nature tourism sites such as sites at Bhopal and Jabalpur, Bhimbetka, Gwalior, Khajurao and Mandu's heritage sites. Madhya Pradesh is also famous for its rich wildlife tourism sites like Kanha national park, Bandhavgarh national park and Panna national park. There are some spiritual sites, such as the ancient city of Ujjain, Chitrakoot, Amarkantak and Maheshwar, to accommodate spiritual tourists' needs (Madhya Pradesh Tourism, 2020).

Tourist destinations in Madhya Pradesh have improved connectivity through a spread of air travel, well-connected roads and railways. Due to its central location mostly all long-running trains have junction through Bhopal. Madhya Pradesh has improved its air connectivity through a well-connected air network that connects all its major cities to the rest of the country and the world. At present Madhya Pradesh has five airports at Bhopal, Indore, Gwalior, Jabalpur and Khajuraho out of then Bhopal and Indore are the international airports. Madhya Pradesh accommodates a large diversified population as it is sixth largest in terms of population. Hence, the sample includes the participants from the different socio-cultural background.

Research Questions

As the purpose of this study was to know the views of tourists on how much preference they give to user-generated content while planning their trip, only those individuals were included who use the internet to help make their travel plans.

Hence, this paper attempts to investigate the following research questions:

RQ1: Do consumers trust user-generated content sources while making their travel planning decisions

RQ2: How much trustworthy they consider these sources compared to the information provided by the travel companies and other traditional sources.

Research Objectives

To find out the answers to the above research questions, the study has the following objectives:

- To measure the level of engagement in user - generated content among tourists depending on their age and gender.
- To measure the source influence on the trustworthiness of user-generated content.
- To measure the influence of reviewer similarity on the trustworthiness of user-generated content.

Review of Literature

Buhalis and Law (2008) emphasised on the relationship between technological advancements and tourism growth. These advancements have resulted in developing new tools that facilitated better and fast coordination among tourism stakeholders to give better tourism experience. One of the technological advances is the internet that has changed the way tourism businesses are being done. It has also changed the tourism organisations' relationship with its consumers (Buhalis & Law, 2008; Buhalis, 2003).

Social media and User-generated content

Social media and user-generated content are two different terms but are often confused with one another. Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) defined social media as "web-based applications" that help in the dissemination of user-generated content. Hence, social media is a tool that facilitates the creation and dissemination of user-generated content. Social media platforms allow for "real-time" recording and sharing of tourism experiences that enhance personal virtual identities (Munar, 2012; Munar & Jacobsen, 2014). It is always the content that plays an important role in travel decision-making. Tourism organisations provided earlier the content, but now after the advent of social media, consumers can also participate actively in co-creation of content by engaging in online conversations popularly known as user-generated content. Some researchers define user-generated content as the repository of online content created by users (Edwards, Cheng, Wong, Zhang, & Wu, 2017).

The content shared through social media can be textual or visual. Tourism activities like sightseeing which is deeply related to image-making, create visual content (Munar & Jacobsen, 2014). Information sharing by textual and narrative communicative practices like blogs and written reviews creates textual content (Munar & Jacobsen, 2014; Stoeckl, Rohrmeier & Hess, 2007).

Since the advent of mobile social media sharing, the creation of user-generated content has gone up (Chen & Law, 2016). Social media developments have made available a global database of consumer information that was earlier private and undisclosed shared only within small circles of family and friends (Munar & Jacobsen, 2014). Social media is the base for user-generated content, it facilitates storytelling, gives a sense of belongingness through virtual travel communities and sharing experiences on any time to a large audience (Gretzel, Fesenmaier & O'Leary, 2006).

User-generated content in the form of electronic word of mouth helps visualise the different perspectives of a destination. However, the electronic word of mouth is considered less credible than traditional word of mouth (Tham, Croy & Mairh, 2013). Although, social media is

the most common source of information search about travel-related services. Other channels further help in the information search, such as search engines, service providers' official web pages and booking sites. When the travel content is generated through the known channels, it is perceived as most trustworthy compared to the content available on the organisation's website (Varkaris & Neuhofer, 2017).

Trust issues with user-generated content

Filieri (2016) defined "a trustworthy review as a review that is perceived by the reader as the honest, sincere, truthful, and which has no commercial opinion and which is given by a tourist who has visited the destination and has experienced the product and services there".

Trust in the user-generated content plays an essential role in the formation of expectations by the tourists about the core resources as well as the supportive services (Narangajavana et.al., 2017). On the user-generated content websites, sometimes it is difficult to determine the authenticity of opinions especially when these opinions are from the anonymous sources (Dellarocas, 2003; Park, Lee & Han, 2007; Litvin, Goldsmith & Pan, 2008; Ayeh, Au & Law, 2013). Other issues are the correctness and reliability of UGC platforms such as company-directed sharing and subjective sharing because of anger or dissatisfaction.

Trust in UGC depends on the source website from which it belongs (Yoo & Gretzel, 2010; Schuckert, Liu & Law, 2015).

Although the source credibility of user-generated content influences the recommendation intentions of the consumers, the importance of electronic word of mouth is increasing gradually but there is a lack of mechanism by which these sources' credibility could be evaluated. Hence, travellers rely on various cues such as personal information (travel interest and location) of the online travel reviewers, to evaluate online reviews' credibility (Park, Xiang, Josiam & Kim, 2014). Personal information (eg. name, place, duration of stay) about online reviewers helps make review trustworthy (Xie et.al, 2011). If a consumer finds any similarity with the reviewer, they tend to believe it more (Burger et.al., 2004).

Broadly written biased reviews and information overload are some issues related to the user-generated content in online reviews (O'Mahony & Smyth, 2010). Also, lack of control and verification of information makes it easy to post false information about a product (Torres, Singh

& Ring, 2015). The more specific and informative reviews are considered more credible and influential by consumers (Chen & Law, 2016). Further, the reviews in written form are considered more useful than numerical ratings. User-generated content, especially in the form of online reviews, comes from strangers that make it hard to judge the views (Litvin et. al., 2008). There are some other issues with user-generated content such as there are chances of strategic manipulations by the organisation (Dellarocas, 2003; Litvin et.al., 2008; Ayeh, 2015). Some businesses try to pose them as real customers and write positive reviews about their product. However, such manipulation should be avoided as customers are well aware of tactics and can harm the brand's reputation (Cox et.al., 2009). Some marketers even pay the web

handlers, to delete the consumers' negative comments or even employ people to post negative comments for the competitor's products (Ayeh, Au & Law, 2013; Yan et.al., 2018).

The credibility of the user-generated content source depends on perceived expertise and trustworthiness. When the source is considered credible by the consumer, it is easy to persuade and bring behavioural change in potential consumers (Chen & Law, 2016). Hence, the perception of source credibility is positively associated with user-generated content usage (Chen & Law, 2016).

Research Gap

The above review of the literature reveals the importance of UGC in travel planning, and along with that, many studies had discussed the various trust issues related to UGC sources. However, a few have attempted to focus on how trustworthy tourists consider these UGC sources after having so much trust issues. This study attempt to fill this gap and try to find out what are the factors that influence the trustworthiness of UGC. From the analyses perspective, three measures have been derived from the literature that will further help in

assessing the influence of various factors on the trustworthiness of UGC.

Measures and Hypotheses development

Usefulness

Wang (2016) conducted a study and suggested that user-generated content has gained importance as the primary source of information in making travel-related decisions. It helps in the exploration of the destination by providing various reviews. User-generated content in the form of online reviews can work as informants as well as recommendations (Park, Lee & Han, 2007).

The usefulness of information is one of the popular indicators of trustworthiness of the UGC sources' information. Consumers whose internet usage is higher tend to use UGC for their travel planning more often. Further, the usage also depends on the gender, age, income and education level (Ip, Lorenzo-Romero & Alarcón-del-Amo, 2012; Del Chiappa, Lee & Law, 2015). However, consumers who travel often but do not use the internet much, consider user-generated content as less trustworthy (Del Chiappa, Lee & Law, 2015). Therefore, we hypothesised that its perceived usefulness influences user-generated content's trustworthiness by the consumers. We also hypothesised that there is a difference in user-generated content usage among consumers depending on their gender and age.

H1: Trustworthiness of UGC is influenced by its perceived usefulness by the consumers.

H2: There is a difference in the use of UGC in travel planning, depending on their gender.

H3: There is a difference in the use of UGC in travel planning, depending on their age group.

Reliability

Consumer perception of trustworthiness of user-generated content is also affected by consumer involvement, experience and type of website it belongs i.e. the source (Filieri, 2016). Source trustworthiness depends on the reliability, sincerity and honesty (Ohanian, 1990; Filieri, 2016). The travel reviews that are from large feedback platforms and consumer-centric websites are considered more reliable and authentic due to their presumed independence from corporate influence (Forman, Ghose & Wiesenfeld, 2008). Hence, travel reviews' source plays an essential role in determining information reliability (Park, Xiang, Josiam & Kim 2014). Therefore, we hypothesised that the reliability of UGC influences the trustworthiness of UGC and UGC is considered more reliable than the other travel information sources like travel agents and government websites. We also hypothesised that the source of the user-generated content influences the reliability of user-generated content.

H4: Reliability of user-generated content influences the trustworthiness of the UGC

H5: Source of UGC influences the reliability of UGC.

H6: UGC is considered more reliable than the information provided by travel agents.

H7: UGC is considered more reliable than the information provided by government websites.

Credibility

Ayeh (2015) suggested that perceived credibility and expertise play a vital role in the trustworthiness of user-generated content from consumers' perspective. Reviews given by the people who have expertise and knowledge in the field of a particular product or services are called expert reviews and considered more credible than the reviews made by the other consumers. Schuckert, Liu and Law (2015) conducted research to assess online ratings' credibility and found a significant gap between overall ratings and individual ratings. This gap is especially found among the lower class hotels. They also calculated the proportion of suspicious ratings that was found about twenty per cent at a standard of 0.5. Thus, it can hamper the credibility of UGC in the form of online reviews that in turn, can influence the trustworthiness of UGC. It is effortless to form and change identities online, which creates concerns about such user-generated

content platforms (Dallarocas, 2003; Ayeh, Au & Law, 2013). Personal information (eg. name, place, duration of stay) about online reviewers help in making reviews trustworthy (Xie, Miao,Kuo & Lee, 2011).

If a consumer finds any similarity with the reviewer, they tend to find it more related and trustworthy (Burger et.al., 2004). Therefore we hypothesized that personal information of the reviewer positively influences the credibility of the user-generated content. Along with this we also hypothesised that any similarity with the reviewer increases the credibility of the review which is a form of user-generated content.

H8: Expert reviews increase the credibility of information about a travel product.

H9: Personal information of the reviewer increases the credibility of the review.

H10: Any similarity with the reviewer increases the credibility of the review.

Methodology

Data collection and sampling

An online survey method was used for data collection, and a judgmental sampling technique was used. The survey method is considered best suited for getting information about the population's opinion and attitude (Kerlinger, 1973). The data was collected from September 2020 to October 2020, which is the period just before the winter and considered pleasant to visit almost any destination in Madhya Pradesh. Researchers have observed this is festive in the whole country and a good number of tourist are travelling for different purposes. The respondents were selected based on their familiarity with the internet and the frequency of their use of the internet during their travel plan. It was also made sure that the respondents have an experience of planning a trip based on the user-generated content before the study was conducted. The questionnaires were sent via Google Forms an online survey platform.

There are various methods of sampling depending on the type of study. Considering the purpose of the study that is to determine whether tourists consider the user-generated sources trustworthy while making their travel plan and how much they use the information provided by these sources. Therefore, our population include only those individuals who are well familiar with internet technology as well as they include the user-generated sources in their source of information list while planning a trip. Hence, the sample size was decided based on the number of items in the questionnaire i.e. 150. Out of 150 questionnaires sent out, 111 were returned that were fit for analysis. The response rate was 74% above 60% and considered fit for conducting statistical analysis (Kaurav, Paul & Chowdhary, 2015).

Instrument of Measurement

A questionnaire was prepared based on the review of the literature to obtain the required information. The questionnaire mentioned the purpose of the research and ensured the confidentiality of the answers. The questionnaire constituted two types of questions; the first type of questions was related to demographic information. The second type of questions was related to UGC sources' use in their travel planning and the questions related to their trust level in these sources.

Data analysis

For data analysis, Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) was employed. First of all descriptive analysis was done to compute the demographic profile of the sample. Then the Exploratory Factor Analysis was conducted to reduce the dimensions that make the interpretation easy. In the next step, independent sample T-test and one-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) tools were employed to compare the various means.

Results and Findings

Sample Profile

Table 1 provides the demographic profile of the respondents. In total there were 111 respondents (27%) females and (73%) males. Age limit ranging from 20 to 55+ out of the 25 respondents (22.5%) were from the age group 20-25 years; 70 respondents (63.1%) that were the maximum numbers of respondents were from the age group 25-30 years; 8 respondents (7.2%) were from the age group 30-35 years; 2 respondents (1.8%)

were from the age group 35-40 years; 1 respondent (.9%) was from the age group 40-50 years; 2 respondents (1.8%) were from the age group 50-55 years, and three respondents (2.7%) were from the age group above 55 years.

Table 1. Demographic profile of respondents

Categories	Frequency	Percentage
Age Group		
20-25	25	22.5
25-30	70	63.1
30-35	8	7.2
35-40	2	1.8
40-50	1	.9
50-55	2	1.8
55+	3	2.7
Gender		
Female	30	27.0
Male	81	73.0
City		
Bhopal	35	31.5
Gwalior	47	42.3
Indore	18	16.2
Jabalpur	11	9.9

Measure of reliability

Reliability analysis was done to test the reliability of the scale (questionnaire). **Table 2** shows the Cronbach's Alpha score for all the concerning items was.815 above the prescribed value and thus can allow the data for further analysis.

Table 2. Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient

Cronbach's Alpha	Number of items
0.815	10

Exploratory Factor Analysis (Principal Component Analysis)

To further investigate the number of constructs, exploratory factor analysis was done. Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity methods were employed to prove the constructs' communalities. The KMO value was.776 (above the acceptable value of 0.7) and Bartlett's test was found significant at the significance value of 0.000 (below 0.05). The communalities were all above 0.3 that confirms that each item shared some common variance with other items. The principal component analysis was employed to reduce the dimensionality of the data to increase its interpretability.

Initial eigenvalues indicated that the first three factors explained 39.65%, 11.98% and 10.02% of the variance, respectively. The other factors had eigenvalues just over one, and each explained the variance of nearly 9%. The ten variables were reduced to three components by using the Kaiser rule. The three components explained 62% of the variance in the data. The first two components explain more of the variance (25% and 23% respectively) than the third one (14%).

Table 3. Factor loadings based on principal component analysis

Measures	Items	Factor loadings
Credibility	Expert reviews increase the credibility of information available on user-generated content sources	.783
	Any similarity with the reviewer increases the reliability of the information	.647
	Personal information of the reviewer increases the credibility of the information	.685
	If there are mostly positive reviews but a few are negative about a destination do you get influenced by the negative reviews	.497
Reliability	How much reliable are the user-generated sources in your opinion	.834
	Do you trust user-generated content sources more than the government websites	.564
	Do you trust user-generated sources more than the travel agents	.730
	Does the website on which user-generated content is available influences the reliability of the information	.896
Usefulness	How much useful do you find user-generated content sources for your travel planning	.875
	Do you make changes in your travel plans based on user-generated content sources	.457

As shown in Table 3, changes made in travel plans based on UGC and the influence of negative reviews had the factor loadings 0.457 and 0.497 which is less than 0.5 and hence it had to be excluded.

Hypotheses testing

An independent samples t-test was conducted to compare the mean usage of UGC based on gender. There was not a significant difference in the mean scores of female (M= 3.15, SD=.408) and male (M=3.38, SD=.609) usage conditions; t (109)=1.859, p=.066. These results suggest that there is a difference in the use of UGC sources based on gender. Thus, H2 was supported. A one-way ANOVA was conducted to compare the mean usage of UGC based on the age group. The results showed a significant difference in the use of UGC at the p<.05 based on the age groups [F (6, 104)=3.019, p=.009]. These results suggest that the use of UGC for travel planning differ among the different age groups. Thus, H3 was supported.

We hypothesized that user-generated content's usefulness and reliability would influence the UGC's trustworthiness in travel planning, respectively (H1 and H4). The results of the ANOVA analysis showed that usefulness and reliability had a significant effect at p<.05 on the trustworthiness of UGC [F(4, 106)=26.150, p=.000] and [F(4,106)=30.601, p=.000] respectively. Thus, supporting H1and H4.

We had also hypothesized that there is an influence of the source of the UGC website on the trustworthiness of UGC (H5) and the results showed that source of the website does have an influence at p<.05 on the trustworthiness of the UGC [F(4, 103)=9.031,p=.000]. Hence, supporting the H5. In H6 and H7, we hypothesized that UGC is considered more reliable than the travel agents and government websites, respectively. The results showed that the reliability of UGC more than the travel agents and the government websites had a significant association with the overall trust in the UGC. [F (4,106) =40.953, p=.000] and [F (4,104) =23.282, p=.000] respectively. Thus, H6 and H7 were supported.

In H8, we argued that expert reviews would increase the credibility of the UGC. Expert reviews had a significant effect at the p<.05 on the credibility of the UGC [F(4, 104)=25.209, p=.000]. Thus, supporting the H8. We had also hypothesized that the reviewer's personal information and similarity would influence the review's credibility, which is a form of UGC (H9 and H10). The results proved that personal information of the reviewer and the similarity with the reviewer had a significant influence on the credibility of the review which in turn influences the trustworthiness of UGC [F (4,103)=22.778, p=.000] and [F(4,102)=15.587,

p=.000] respectively. Hence, H9 and H10 were also supported.

Table 4. Description of hypotheses testing

Hypotheses	F/t	P	Supported/Not Supported
H1: Trustwothiness of UGC is influenced by its perceived usefulness by the consumer.	F(4, 106)=26.150	.000	Supported
H2: There is a difference in the use of UGC in travel planning, depending on their gender.	t(109)=1.859	.066	Supported
H3: There is a difference in the use of UGC in travel planning, depending on their age group.	3.019	.009	Supported
H4: Reliability of user-generated content influences the trustworthiness of the UGC	F(4,106)=30.601	.000	Supported
H5: Source of UGC influences the reliability of UGC.	F(4, 103)=9.031	.000	Supported

H6: UGC is considered more reliable than the information provided by travel agents.	F (4,106)=40.953	.000	Supported
H7: UGC is considered more reliable than the information provided by government websites.	F (4,104)=23.282	.000	Supported
H8: Expert reviews increase the credibility of information about a travel product.	F(4, 104)=25.209	.000	Supported
H9: Personal information of the reviewer increases the credibility of the review.	F(4,103)=22.778	.000	Supported
H10: Any similarity with the reviewer increases the credibility of the review.	F(4,102)=15.587	.000	Supported

Discussion and Conclusion

User-generated content is getting attention by many researchers as it has now started to play an essential role in the travel planning decisions of consumers. Several studies have been done on the role of user-generated content in travel panning and in what phase of the trip planning it is mostly being used (e.g. Gretzel, 2006; Park, Lee & Han, 2007; Pan & Fesenmaier, 2006; Filho, Tan & Mills, 2012). However, a few have put some light on the issue of trustworthiness of user-generated content. Thus, this study aims to determine how much trustworthy user-generated content is considered by the consumers and the factors that influence user-generated content's trustworthiness. The results suggest that user-generated content is considered more trustworthy as compared to the most traditional sources of information used for gathering information to decide on travel planning and hence, contradicting the findings of Cox et. al., (2009) research. The findings of this work can be justified by the fact that the experiences shared by the consumers are their real experiences and shared by them by their own. There are very less chances of fake reviews because you cannot illustrate about a place until and unless you being there. Additionally, the reviews and feedback shared online can be compared with the with each other which also increases the trustworthiness of the reviews because some or more similarity in most of the review's must exist. This increases the reliability and credibility of the online content about tourism experiences.

Pan & Fasenmaier (2006) suggested that the consumer's most important decision is

accommodation in trip planning. On the contrary, the preliminary descriptive data of this research revealed that user-generated content is used for information on accommodation and that it is also used for getting information about the mode of transport, destination attractions, and the prices of various services (Table 5). Further, the descriptive data also revealed that while consumers use user-generated content platforms like youtube, they still visit the official travel websites to plan their trip.

Table 5. The general descriptive data about the usage of UGC in trip planning

Item	Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Do you search UGC sources to get information for your trip planning	Never	7	6.3
	Rarely	14	12.6
	Sometimes	43	38.7
	Often	19	17.1
	Always	28	25.2
Which are the most searched online platforms for getting the travel information	Official travel websites	23	20.7
	TripAdvisor	6	5.4
	Facebook	3	2.7
	Instagram	3	2.7
	Youtube	22	19.8
	Blogs	2	1.8
	All of the above	52	46.8
You mainly search UGC sources to decide about	Accommodation	10	9.0
	Mode of transport	8	7.2
	Destination attractions	19	17.1
	Price	2	1.8
	All of the above	72	64.9

All the hypotheses were supported empirically. Usefulness, reliability and credibility

were the three measures of trustworthiness that were considered in this study. The

trustworthiness of user-generated content is dependent on its perceived usefulness by the consumers. However, there was a difference in the usage of UGC sources depending on the age and gender of the consumers. Gretzel et.al. (2007) found that the type of the website on which the review is posted can influence the trustworthiness of the information. This study also found that UGC was considered more reliable than the other information sources such as travel agents and government websites.

Hence, the source of UGC can influence the reliability of UGC that in turn influences the trustworthiness of it. Online reviews are the popular form of UGC hence the credibility of these reviews were also assessed, and it was found that the credibility of a review increases when an expert gives it. Further, personal information of the reviewer also increases the credibility of a review. If a consumer finds any similarity with the reviewer, it also contributes to making it more credible and ultimately making the review more trustworthy.

Managerial implications

User-generated content has become an essential part of travel planning, and along with this, the trust issues relating to UGC has also been arising. As more tourists use UGC for their trip planning it provides an opportunity for managers to understand tourists' behaviour and enhance their reputation and trust in the travel product by providing them authenticated and reliable information. Our research shows that consumers from the age group of 25-30 are more engaged in the user-generated content (Table 5). Therefore managers should focus on the consumers of that age group. Further, the research also revealed that consumers rely on UGC more than the travel agents. So they should utilise the UGC platforms to reach its target audience. They can also give appropriate incentives to the experts for giving feedback on their products. Managers should also make their review platforms more fair and transparent to make it more trustworthy. Managers should try to bring the filters which automatically remove or did not allow to post the fake reviews. Managers should also make efforts to encourage consumers to provide their reviews and feedback through emails which connect the consumers directly to the desired site on which reviews and feedback are needed to be posted.

Theoretical implications

Our research also has the methodological implication as it contributes to the tourism literature by providing the measures of trustworthiness of UGC. This study examined the measures of trustworthiness in the context of UGC in travel planning. It provides the antecedents influencing the trustworthiness of UGC in travel planning. The study adds to the tourism literature and thus deepens the insights on consumers' trust behaviour regarding the acceptance and usage of UGC in travel planning.

Limitations and Future scope

This study does have some limitations that need to be considered when interpreting the results. However All the hypotheses were supported empirically. Usefulness, reliability and credibility were the three measures of trustworthiness that were considered in this study. Hence, there can be more variables to it. Thus, future research can focus on other variables also. Second, we did not take into account the income and education level of the consumers. Future research may examine whether the trust in UGC is affected by the income and education level of the consumers. Hence, this study's results are limited to this region and cannot be generalised, hence giving scope for further research in other regions.

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