

A STUDY OF IMPACT OF USER UPLOADED PHOTOS ON VALENCE OF ONLINE REVIEW RATINGS

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ABSTRACT

Online reviews have been widely studied in the hospitality and tourism literature. Travel photos notify and encourage consumers by passing on direct travel experience. Despite the increase in travel photos in online reviews, analyzing the effects of photos remains a challenge. This study attempts to find the impact of user uploaded photos on valence of online review ratings. Data of 151 hotels was collected from the travel review website. The findings support the proposed hypotheses.

KEYWORDS: *Online Reviews, User Uploaded Photos, Valence Ratings, Travel Review Website*

INTRODUCTION

An individual learns many things from friends, colleagues, relatives and others such as which places to visit and which products to buy. The aptness to provide and examine reviews online has orderly changed the exploration process. Instead of asking friends or experts for references, today most of the people turn to review websites before traveling to a new city or going for a dinner eating at a new restaurant. With the widespread acceptance of the smartphone applications in routine life, people use social media platforms to interact with each others, online photo sharing has become a collaborative activity that enables an individual exchange of opinions, recommendations and experiences. Mainly in hospitality and tourism, taking photos plays an essential role in the travelling experience along with photo sharing as an important activity in remembering, recording and sharing that particular experience (Chalfen, 1979; Garrod, 2008; Markwell, 1997; MacKay & Fesenmaier, 1997). While photo sharing may help many purposes, user provided photos on online are becoming progressively significant in the situation of product evaluation (Konjin et al., 2016; Vu et al., 2015).

Review of Literature

The studies on the topic of online consumer reviews have focused their attention on aspect of consumer decision making process. The research into the effect of online reviews on consumer purchasing behavior has mainly discussed the concepts of trust and reliability in online reviews. Earlier studies on photos in online reviews overviews as follows:

Zou, Yu and Hao (2011) results indicated that the impact of online reviews valence is mediated by customer expertise. The influence variance between negative reviews and positive reviews is greater for consumers with low proficiency than for those with high proficiency. Liu and Park (2015) demonstrated that subjective aspects of reviews were acknowledged as the most influential factors that make travel reviews useful. The sharing economy is varying industry dynamics in the tourism sector. The results revealed that trustworthy photos do result with a price premium where the hosts (an individual who rents residence) whose pictures are perceived as more trustworthy by the guests are charged higher

prices than their less trustworthy counterparts (Ert, Fleischer and Magen, 2016). While doing online research about restaurants potential consumers search for pictures of food and physical proofs of restaurants generated by other users. Findings also showed that consumers found user generated photos at websites of reviews though there was the importance of restaurant owned platforms such as official social media pages and websites (Oliveira and Casais, 2018). Ma, Xiang, Du, and Fan (2018) compared deep learning models with other machine learning methods to study the effect of user provided photos on review helpfulness. While only user provided photos did not have the same impact as written reviews but combining user provided photos and review texts produced the highest performance. Xia, Pan, Zhou and Zhang (2020) explored customer purchasing patterns to assess the influence of product photos on sales. In the electronic environment, the purchasing intentions of consumers are affected by a number of factors related to the information system such as, the design of web pages, the quality of the website and the display of product details. Therefore, online stores need to distinguish themselves to attract customers with their unique features and show their best first impressions. An, Ma, Du, Xiang and Fan (2020) found that people contribute by posting photos for hotels with a superior level of luxury or service or when they had a positive experience staying at hotels. Yim, Malefyt and Khuntia, (2021) provided a framework to process and infer various photographic elements on user engagement using learning algorithms. They proposed that a photo can suplicate consumers subjective interpretations of photos portraying creative, credible or emotional dimensions of the destination experience. Li et al. (2021) results show that reviews accompanied by user generated photos are usually rated as more helpful than those with written content only. Our paper adds to this literature by investigating the effect of photos associated with valence of online reviews ratings.

Research Framework

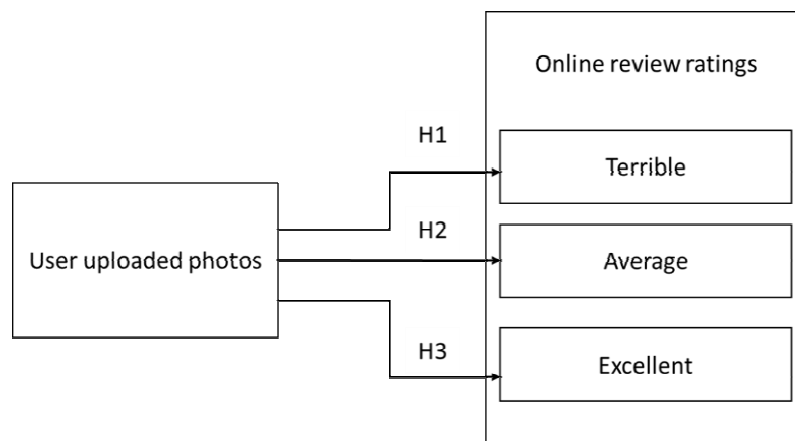


Figure: 1

SAMPLING METHODOLOGY

Convenience sampling method is implemented in this study. Data of 151 hotels was collected from the travel review website. The sorting process applied to select the hotels was distance to the Centre of the Goa. Data of number of user uploaded photos was collected for each hotel from travel website and then for valence of online review ratings: terrible ratings [1-star review ratings], average ratings [3-star review ratings] and excellent ratings [5-star review ratings] were collected for the respective hotel. The samples with incomplete data was rejected. The sample size of 136 hotels was analyzed for the study. The research model above figure 1.

The aim of this paper is to study the impact of user uploaded photos on valence of online reviews ratings. This study is descriptive in nature.

DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

The data analysis on impact of user uploaded photos towards online review ratings studied and analyzed with the help of correlation analysis which are highlighted as under:

Pearson Correlation Analysis between user uploaded photos towards terrible online review ratings of hotels

Objective 1: To Find Out the impact of user uploaded photos on terrible online review ratings.

H1: User uploaded photos are positively associated with terrible online review ratings.

From the correlation analysis (table 1), there was a positive user uploaded photos and terrible online review ratings, which ($r = 0.626, p <.01$) implied that these two variables positively associated.

Table 1: Correlation Analysis for Hypothesis H1

		Users Uploaded Photos	Terrible Ratings
Users Uploaded Photos	Pearson Correlation	1	.626**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	136	136
Terrible Ratings	Pearson Correlation	.626**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	136	136

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Source: Computed data

Pearson Correlation Analysis between user uploaded photos towards average online review ratings of hotels

Objective 2: To Find Out the impact of user uploaded photos on average online review ratings.

H2: User uploaded photos are positively associated with average online review ratings.

From the correlation analysis (table 2), there was a positive user uploaded photos and average online review ratings, which ($r = .838, p <.01$) implied that these two variables positively associated.

Table 2: Correlation Analysis for Hypothesis H2

		Users Uploaded Photos	Average Ratings
Users Uploaded Photos	Pearson Correlation	1	.838**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	136	136
Average Ratings	Pearson Correlation	.838**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	136	136

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Source: Computed data

Pearson Correlation Analysis between user uploaded photos towards excellent online review ratings of hotels

Objective 3: To Find Out the impact of user uploaded photos on excellent online review ratings

H3: User uploaded photos are positively associated with excellent online review ratings.

From the correlation analysis (table 3), there was a positive user uploaded photos and average online review ratings, which ($r = .846, p < .01$) implied that these two variables positively associated.

Table 3: Correlation Analysis for Hypothesis H3

		Users Uploaded Photos	Excellent Ratings
Users Uploaded Photos	Pearson Correlation	1	.846**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	136	136
Excellent Ratings	Pearson Correlation	.846**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	136	136

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Source: Computed data.

Ranking the strength of correlation of user uploaded photos with online review ratings (table 4)

Table 4: Ranking of Variables

Ranking	Strength of Correlation User Uploaded Photos	Online Review Ratings
1	.846	Excellent Ratings
2	.838	Average Ratings
3	.626	Terrible Ratings

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The study indicated that hypothesis analysis of user uploaded photos through Pearson's correlation ($r = .846, p = .000$) for excellent ratings, ($r = .838, p = .000$) for average ratings, ($r = 0.626, p = .000$) for terrible ratings. Strength of correlation is shown in table 4, that overall there was a positive relationship between user uploaded photos on valence of online reviews ratings. These outcomes were similar with the previous studies to Lee and Shin (2014) they noted that high quality reviews enhanced website evaluation only when the reviewers photos were present, proposing that such visual indications may facilitate methodical message processing. Saiz, Salazar and Bernard (2018) validated that buildings with higher ratings were found more likely to be geo tagged with user generated photos in both Google Maps and Flickr. Kim, Kim and Key (2020) found that in the review generation process the reviewers are more likely to upload a profile photo to improve the credibility of their reviews. Marder, Erz, Angell, and Plangger (2021) controlled experiments results revealed that the negative effects of amateur photography are lessened when presented alongside positive reviews.

CONCLUSION

The results show that users find less evidence to capture in form of photos and upload in case of negative experience compared to positive experience while staying at hotels. Users go for textual route to express themselves about the bad experiences they stayed at the hotels. The users upload photos to support their opinions in a way that seems decisive. Thus uploading images of themselves is one of the best ways to convince other users. As for managerial implications, managers can inspire to take and post more alluring photos. Hotels would benefit if users upload more photos on their profiles and hotel profile pages on social media platforms generating word of mouth.

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