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Are User-Generated Photos Able To Attract More Attention?

Some destination marketing organisations (DMO) apply user-generated photos (UGP) instead of common commercial photos (CP) in different scopes of online marketing. Research has not investigated differences in elaboration and impact between UGP and CP so far. Due to previous research, the authors propose that individuals' involvement due to motivation to process UGP and due to attention is higher compared to CP. To address this topic, a research hypothesis is developed assuming that UGP enhance attention due to higher involvement compared to CP. A theoretical explanation is given why UGP entail higher attention compared to CP. An outlook on a field study that should be conducted is presented. Finally, expected research findings and managerial implications are discussed.

Keywords: User-Generated Photos; Commercial Photos; Destination Marketing; Online Marketing Effectiveness; Attention.

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Introduction

Photos of destinations taken by tourists are used to explain tourists' experiences during the journey (MacKay & Couldwell, 2004) and verify that a person visited a place (Hillman, 2007). For DMOs, photos are crucial means to successfully create and communicate the image of a destination (e.g., Garrod, 2009; Stepchenkova & Zhan, 2012). Across alpine regions, CP are usually quite similar due to a similar and comparable landscape, scenery and atmosphere (Hem et al., 2003). How can an alpine region set itself apart in terms of the photos it displays to attract more attention and as a consequence to enhance online marketing effectiveness? A recent online-survey (n= 2.500) in Germany and Austria showed that authentic and target group oriented destination photos are more effective than common CP in the scope of online marketing (Scharl, 2013). One possibility for DMOs to gain authenticity and target group orientation is to apply UGP. A study from Skyscanner (2011) asserted that about 52% of Social Network Site (SNS) users regard UGP to be an influencing factor for their future travels. According to Yoo et al. (2009) 50.6 % of tourists draw on UGP when planning a trip. Lo et al. (2011) determine that 89% of all travellers create photos and that 41 % of these will be shared online (e.g., Facebook, Flickr). It is known that non-commercial types of marketing (e.g., destination-specific TV-films) can increase tourism demand more than commercial messages (Connell, 2005). And on the other hand, DMOs achieved on average 200 shares per post on SNS in October 2013 (Quinby et al., 2014). Hence, encouraging travellers to share their photos on DMO owned media (e.g., website or SNS) might be one possibility for alpine regions to set themselves apart in terms of the photos they display to attract more attention and as a consequence to enhance online marketing effectiveness. For example, Lyon Tourism in France actively encourages travellers to share their photos and experiences on their website (www.lyon-france.com/Lyon-City-Reporter). Or Australians share their favourite domestic holiday destinations with the world

by uploading nearly 30,000 stories and photos to www.nothinglikeaustralia.com, due to a marketing campaign. This paper concentrates on the underlying question whether attention and online marketing effectiveness can be enhanced by the use of UGP compared to CP.

Previous Research and Research Gap

There are several streams of research investigating user-generated content (UGC) in the context of destinations or UGP as one application of UGC (e.g., Cox et al., 2009). Table 1 provides an overview of measurement context, methods, objectives and results of relevant empirical studies concerning UGC or UGP.

Author	Method and objective of the empirical study	Results
Studies measuring the content of UGC/UGP:		
Pang et al. (2011)	Network analysis of UGP with destination tags on *Flickr* via web application	Representative visual and textual destination summaries
Stepchenkova, Zhan (2012)	Content analysis of UGP on Flickr and CP from destination website	High congruence between UPG and CP
Pan et al. (2007)	Network and content analysis of UGC (blogs)	Representative textual destination summaries
Studies measuring the impact of different UGC sources:		
Cox et al. (2009)	Online traveller survey (OTS) to identify the importance and trust in different UGC sources	Tourism websites are more important than UGC (within UGC, UGP is most important)
Dickinger (2011)	Face-to-Face traveller survey to identify the drivers of trust in online information sources	DMOs are the most trustworthy compared to other sources
Ye et al. (2011)	Relation between crawler-based identified internet hotel reviews and online sales	Valence of UGC (hotel reviews) influences online sales
Yoo et al. (2009)	OTS to identify the determinants, impacts and benefits of trust in UGC	Most important determinant: Trust in UGC author; most important benefit: information and imagination
Munar, Jacobsen (2013)	Face-to-Face traveller survey to identify the trustworthiness of different UGC sources and consumer behaviour concerning UGC	DMO websites most trustworthy UGC sources in general not important concerning travel decisions
Nusair et al. (2013)	OTS to identify determinants of SNS loyalty	e.g. affective commitment has a positive influence on loyalty
Leung, Bai (2013)	OTS on the influence of motivation on involvement/behavioural intention	Motivation positively influences SNS involvement and in turn intention
Studies identifying motivations to use UGC:		
Ames, Naaman (2007)	In-depth, semi-structured qualitative interviews concerning motivations to create UGC	Social (public), self-organization and social/friend communication are the main factors
Sas et al. (2009)	Qualitative Diary Study concerning the experiences and drivers to use SNS	Private communication and public performance are main drivers
Studies identifying characteristics of individuals creating UGC/UGP:		
Lo et al. (2011)	Telephone interviews to profile users and non-users of online travel photo-sharing media	Differences in users and non-users according to the type of media

Table 1. Overview of relevant qualitative and quantitative research.

Research investigating the impact of UGC determine that UGP are most important within UGC (e.g., Cox et al., 2009) and identify enhanced trust as one of the main drivers to explain the impact (e.g., Ayeh et al., 2013), particularly, when posted on DMOs own media (Yoo et al., 2009). But none of the studies mentioned in Table 1 analysed differences between

UGP and CP concerning processing and impact. Stepchenkova and Zhan (2012) only determined that there is a high congruence between UGP and CP due to the content of the photos. Drawing on general UGC research, numerous authors (e.g., Lin & Liu, 2012; Lin & Lu, 2011) assert that motivation theories play key roles in understanding UGC. Leung and Bai (2013) found that higher motivation to use social media is correlated with higher SNS involvement and higher SNS revisit intention. But how UGC works in the online marketing context is still an area lacking scholarly research (Leung & Bai, 2013). According to Mason and Rennie (2007, p. 200), "there is a need to understand the dynamics of the attention-grabbing effect of Web 2.0". The next section illustrates why depicting UGP results in higher motivation and attention towards the stimulus compared to CP in the context of online marketing in tourism.

Theoretical Considerations

UGC has been proven to be trustworthy (e.g., Yoo et al., 2009; Del Chiappa, 2011). Travellers see UGC "as realistic and honest chronicles of visitors' experiences" and are intrinsically motivated to use and interact with it (Pan, MacLaurin & Crotts, 2007, p. 37). Deci (1975) stated that there are two basic motivations (extrinsic and intrinsic) underlying individual's behaviour. Lin and Lu (2011) argue that both kinds of motivations are relevant drivers for the intention to use UGC and Leung and Bai (2013) state that the general motivation to use UGC as a personality trait is an important factor to explain the impact of UGC. Furthermore, motivation can be induced situationally as well. Individuals are highly motivated to use and interact with UGP (e.g., tag travel photos) due to a situational motivation (e.g., reputation in the social community or perceived public performance; Ames & Naaman, 2007; Sas et al., 2009). Considering that perceived motivation as a situational factor (Lin & Lu, 2011) is an influencing factor on UGP use, we draw on this assumption to explain that depicting UGP results in higher motivation to elaborate a stimulus compared to CP. An enhanced motivation to elaborate is indicating higher involvement (Leung & Bai,

2013). In general, involvement refers to the perceived relevance of the object (Zaichkowsky, 1985). In this context, the authors suggest an advertising oriented application, meaning that the receiver of a stimulus is personally affected, and hence motivated to respond to the ad (e.g., Petty & Cacioppo, 1979). Besides increased motivation to elaborate, higher involvement implies a higher "degree of attention" (Leung & Bai, 2013, p. 61). Moreover, Mason and Rennie (2007) argue in the same direction, attributing an attention-grabbing effect to UGC. In the context of research on visual attention, unusual photos (Fong et al., 2009), high appealing images (Gilani et al., 2013) or the depiction of humans (Wilkinson & Light, 2011) can increase attention. According to these considerations, we assume that depicting UGP results in higher involvement implying higher motivation to process UGP and higher attention towards the stimulus of UGP compared to CP in the context of online marketing in tourism.

Outlook Field study

In order to test the assumption, a field study should be conducted in the first step to compare the visual attention attributed to UGP and to CP in the context of online marketing in tourism. Duration spent on specific content (Fisher, 2009) should be used as the dependent variable. In order to identify whether UGP attract more attention as the CP, an eye tracking experiment should be applied. The eye tracking technique allows for measurement where a person is looking or what the eye is localizing (Nielsen & Pernice, 2010) and has been used in the tourism sector, particularly in hospitality, to investigate hotel guests' decision-making (e.g., Pan & Zhang, 2010). "According to the mind-eye hypothesis, people are usually thinking about what they are looking at" (Nielsen & Pernice, 2010, p. 9). Linked to this, literature shows that shorter eye fixations are associated with implicit processing, whereas longer eye fixations stand for a deeper processing and a higher level of attention (Glöckner & Herbold, 2011). Based on these findings, eye tracking is the ideal technique to measure attention towards stimuli. The experiment should ideally take place on an existing DMO

website depicting UGP and CP that are comparable due to the content of the photo. The two experimental conditions should furthermore differ according to the text presented with the photos to ensure respondents are aware of the distinction between the two conditions. In the case of CP a short advertising text should be enclosed and in the case of UGP a comparable user text should be added. In order to gather a big sample, the study should be announced on the respective websites of the destinations. In a second step, respondents should answer an online questionnaire to measure all relevant constructs, like involvement, perceived motivation, perceived attention and dependent variables like intention to visit the destination.

Expected Research Findings and Managerial Implications

The authors expect that depicting UGP results in higher involvement implying higher motivation to process and higher attention towards the stimulus compared to CP in the context of online marketing in tourism. In order to be able to outline results concerning online marketing effectiveness, we expect higher behavioural intentions in the case of UGP compared to CP. To be able to give managerial implications regarding the usage of photos in online marketing context, the experiment is a first step to examine the role of attention attributed towards UGP. One implication is that DMOs can enhance online marketing effectiveness by encouraging tourists to post their pictures on destinations' social media network (e.g., the Lyon or Australia examples mentioned before or a picture-of-the-day-Campaigns like www.alta.com/pages/pod.php). To gain more insights, empirical proof of considerations is needed and other effects like different degrees of obviousness of user-generated stimuli should be examined.

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