Unveiling the Influence of User-Generated Content on Tourist Destination Choice: Insights from Moroccan Travel Experiences

L'influence du contenu généré par les utilisateurs sur le choix de la destination par les touristes : les expériences de voyage des Marocains

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This study explores the impact of User-Generated Content (UGC) on local tourists' decision-making when choosing Morocco as their travel destination. It examines factors such as perceived value, enjoyment, risks, and privacy concerns. The research involves in-depth interviews with 10 tourists who have visited Morocco. The study examines how tourists use UGC to plan their trips, their perceptions of information on social media and online review sites, and the broader impacts of UGC on their travel experiences. The findings offer valuable insights into the role of UGC in shaping destination choices and offer practical implications for improving the overall tourist experience in Morocco's tourism industry.

Keywords: UGC (User-Generated Content); Destination choice; Morocco; Tourism businesses; Domestic tourist experience.

Résumé

Cette étude explore l'impact du contenu généré par les utilisateurs (CGU) sur la prise de décision des touristes locaux lorsqu'ils choisissent le Maroc comme destination de voyage. Elle examine des facteurs tels que la valeur perçue, le plaisir, les risques et les préoccupations en matière de protection de la vie privée. La recherche comprend des entretiens approfondis avec 10 touristes qui ont visité le Maroc. L'étude examine la manière dont les touristes utilisent les CGU pour planifier leurs voyages, leur perception de l'information sur les médias sociaux et les sites d'évaluation en ligne, ainsi que l'impact plus large des CGU sur leurs expériences de voyage. Les résultats de l'étude permettent de mieux comprendre le rôle des CGU dans le choix des destinations et ont des implications pratiques pour l'amélioration de l'expérience globale des touristes dans l'industrie du tourisme au Maroc.

Mots-clés : UGC (User-Generated Content) ; Choix de la destination ; Maroc ; Entreprises touristiques ; Expérience touristique intérieure.

Introduction

UGC refers to news content created and delivered largely on the internet by regular people rather than paid experts (Bruns.A, 2016). According to (Naab Annika, 2016), in order to qualify as UGC, the content must have three main characteristics: (1) it must demonstrate a personal contribution, (2) it must be accessible via transmission media that are open to the public, and (3) it must not be derived from professional practices or routines. UGC is important in the tourist business because modern-day customers respect it as evidence of unique travel experiences(Lo Bob et al., 2011).With the rise of Web 2.0 applications such as Facebook, YouTube, and Instagram, travelers now have access to powerful platforms for sharing their experiences and opinions in a variety of formats, including photos, moving images, and videos, which have been shown to be effective, convincing, and memorable in virtual environments (Hautz Johann et al., 2014). It has become customary for tourists to post their vacation images, diaries, remarks, or suggestions (Carvão, 2010). According to (Del Chiappa & Baggio, 2015), UGC is "an important driver of consumer decision-making in the tourism industry."(Kitsios et al., 2022).

A considerable number of research studies in the tourism and hospitality domains have examined the patterns of tourist behavior regarding sharing or utilizing user- generated content (UGC) on social media platforms (Bigné María Lilibeth et al.., 2020), and (Cubas et al.., 2020) and (Bronner & de Hoog, 2010). These studies have identified the types of content that are more likely to be shared or deemed useful on social media platforms (Önder Ulrich; Gindl Stefan, 2019). In addition, factors that influence both UGC sharing behavior, such as trip satisfaction/dissatisfaction and previous sharing experiences, and UGC using behavior, such as the usefulness of UGC, trust in sharers, and perceived similarity to sharers have also been investigated, as demonstrated in studies by (Oliveira Benedita; Tam Carlos, 2020)and (Shin et al., 2019).Furthermore, studies have examined how posted UGC characteristics, including ratings, valence, length, readability, and language style, and sharer characteristics, such as travel and posting frequencies, affect tourist expectations and purchase intentions, as illustrated in studies by (Liu Laurie; Li Robert, 2018a) and (Kaosiri et al., 2017).

In today's digital age, the way tourists make decisions about their travel destinations has undergone a significant transformation. The advent of User-Generated Content (UGC) on social media platforms and online review sites has empowered travelers with a vast array of firsthand experiences and recommendations from fellow tourists. This abundance of UGC has revolutionized destination choice, providing tourists with authentic and real- time information that goes beyond traditional promotional materials. Understanding the impact of UGC on tourist

destination selection is crucial for businesses in the tourism industry, as they seek to adapt their strategies and effectively engage with travelers in this new landscape of peer-generated content. The main focus of our reflection is to examine the impact that user-generated content (UGC) has on tourist destination choice. To gain insight into this question, we conducted 10 in-depth qualitative interviews with senior managers and senior leaders in the tourism industry to understand the role of UGC in customer travel plans. Our study aims to test existing theories by utilizing qualitative interviews.

Our research paper is structured into three main sections: the first is dedicated to literature review related to UGC, the second focuses on the methodology. The third focuses on the results of our study in addition to theorical and managerial implication.

1. Literature review

1.1. User Generated Content

1.1.1. Perceived value

Recognizing how customers seek and assess information during the various phases of trip planning decision-making is critical for businesses in the hospitality andtourism industries (Lee Yanjun et al., 2020); (Rao Naga et al., 2020). Travelers may now easily participate in a digital community that shares their experiences online by visiting websites with User- Generated Content (UGC). Users can create, publish, and share their personalexperiences and interact, share, update, anddistribute content produced by others (Li Shuojia et al. 2019); (Litvin Ronald et al., 2018); (Mendes-Filho Annette et al., 2017); (Kaosiri Luis J. et al., 2017); (Yu Hwansoo et al., 2017).

Recognizing the relevance of a product or service from the point of view of the customer is a helpful consumer skill that isfrequently associated with improved company results(Baka, 2016); (Bigné María Lilibeth et al., 2020). The greater the perceived value of a product or service based on consumer collective evaluation, the larger the customers' commitment to theservice provider (Ciasullo Raffaella; Palumbo Rocco, 2021).Customer perceived value was discovered to be the most important driver of purchase intention, as well as a mediator between emotional reactions and attitudinal loyalty (Liu Laurie; Li Robert, 2018b); (Truong Duy et al., 2020).

Kitsios et al. (2022) viewed the perceived value as a single dimension encompassing features like social value and information value (Suki Norbayah Mohd, 2019)."Social value" refers to the usefulness obtained from the business client firm's acceptance, favorable impression, and social recognition of the service offer and procedure (Suki Norbayah Mohd, 2019). The advantage derived fromacquiring helpful information from friends or professional information providers

that consumers utilize to solve problems or develop their skills and talents is referred to as "information value"(Suki Norbayah Mohd, 2019). The concept of perceived value in relation to social networking sites has received little attention. However, because the relationship between user behavior and perceived value needs to be fully explained, many researchers have taken an interest in the subject. (Hsiao Jung-Jung; Tang Kai-Yu, 2016) investigated whether perceived value promotes customer confidence and continuing usage of mobile social apps and discovered a positive and substantial association between the two notions. (Stahl Kurt et al., 2003) initially stated that consumer value is a vital aspect in developing and keeping a loyal client base, as well as a substantial role in customer acquisition. For example, UGC on social media platforms gives more value to hotels than traditional tactics that rely on offline data, allowing them to pick more relevant and meaningful strategies for their target audiences. (Nguyen & Tong, 2022).

1.1.2. Privacy concerns

Privacy worries are consumers' worry or dissatisfaction about losing control over their personal information or encountering a violation of privacy by unauthorized persons (Kim et al., 2017) In the context of this study, privacy concerns refer to users' fears that their personal data would be unlawfully andillegally gathered by SNS developers oronline corporations when utilizing mobile SNS to obtain travel-related information. According (Mamonov Raquel, 2017), SNS users are concerned about their privacy because they believe that SNS developers or online corporations may disclose their personal information online without their knowledge, leaving them helpless to protect their privacy.

Other researchers have found that SNS users' trust and perceived value inelectronic and mobile commerce, in general, are influenced by privacy concerns(Chang Anne Yenching; Shen Wei-Cheng, 2017; Wang Carolina, 2019), SNS users have a high level of confidence in websites that handle theironline security and have privacy rules in place (Martin, 2018). Interestingly, these researchers observed that due to their enhanced appeal as online services, such websites benefit from being more capable of providing costadvantages and perceived value overall.

1.1.3. Perceived enjoyment

Perceived enjoyment is important in task- oriented systems like online shopping because it influences users' views toward the system. (Bilro Sandra; Guerreiro João, 2018; Kushwaha et al., 2020) Despite its significance, several studies have failed to uncover a substantial link between it and system utilization. The importance of pleasure in media consumption stems from the fact that it is largely used for pleasure or amusement (Liu Laurie; Li Robert, 2018a). Similarly, enjoyment is a key factor in online shopping, and it has a significant impact on users'

attitudes (Hernández-Ortega Héctor et al., 2020).

The inclusion of socially rich imagery in website design can raise users' perceived social presence, which improves their enjoyment and, to a lesser extent, the site's usability. As a result, site designers who want to improve their users' hedonic experience should consider include socially rich imagery in their designs. While researchers agree that enjoyment is important in media consumption (Li Shuojia et al., 2019; Liu Laurie; Li Robert, 2018a; Sanakulov Heikki, 2015), it is frequently defined as an attitude, an emotion, a combination of cognition and affect, or some other positive reaction to media content (Liu Laurie; Li Robert, 2018a).

(Wong Ivan Ka Wai; Tao Zhang, 2019) link perceived usefulness with functional value, whereas pleasure provides consumers with emotional value. As a result, both features are crucial in the behavior of user-generated material. Traditional usability approaches are insufficient for completely investigating technological acceptability, and they should take enjoyment into account. According to research, travelers' intentions to acquire technologies such as online surfing and instant messaging are strongly influenced by their perceived satisfaction.

1.1.4. Perceived risks

"Perceived risk relates to the user's perception of ambiguity and the adverse impact of undertaking an activity or behavior" (Dowling & Staelin, 1994) Physical, mental, social, time, privacy, financial, performance, psychological, personal, and source dangers are included. The current study focuses on two types of perceived risks: performance risk and source risk, which are related to the dysfunctionality of travel- related products and services and the dependability of the source through which travel products and services are accessed via social networking sites (SNS).

Previous research has found that perceived risk can have a negative impact on consumer perceived value, particularly when purchasing expensive products.

(Chen & Dubinsky, 2003).

or new high-tech products that require evaluation of their capabilities (Baka, 2016). Furthermore, trust levels among SNS users are significantly influenced by perceived risk, which can lead to decreased perceived value and trust when SNS users encounter high risks relating to e-commerce and m- commerce activities or encounter difficulties in obtaining information related to travel and tourism matters via mobile SNS (Chang Anne Yenching; Shen Wei-Cheng, 2017; Chen & Dubinsky, 2003b; Pappas, 2015; Wang Qingfei; Han Shengnan, 2016; Yu Hwansoo; Ha Imsook; Zo Hangjung, 2017).

Figure N°1 : Conceptual model
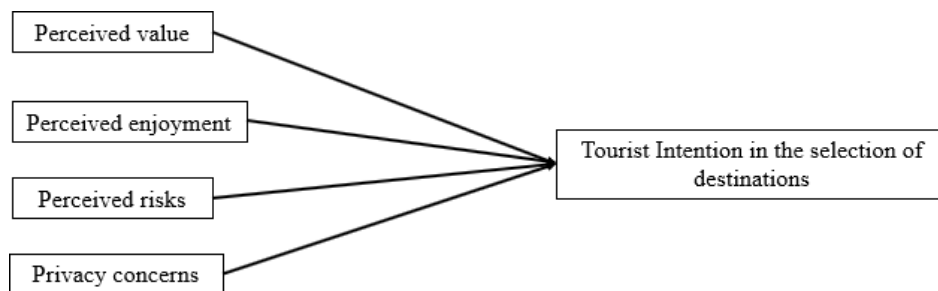
Source : Authors

1.2.Tourist Intention in the selection of destinations

Earlier research defined intention as the"stated likelihood to engage in behavior" (Oliver, 1997) According to the Theory of Planned conduct (TPB), a stronger intention to participate in conduct leads to a higher degree of actual behavior (Ajzen, 1991) As noted by Alegre and (Alegre Magdalena, 2009), tourist intentions have been the topic of various studies on theelements that influence behavioral intention. Positive intentions are suggestiveof tourist loyalty, according to research on behavioral intentions (Prayag et al., 2013). Recent empirical studies on visitors' intentions to visit or revisit a destination (Isa Lizana, 2014) as well as their willingness to recommend thedestination to others have been conducted.(Kim Ki-Joon, 2018; Rajaratnam Vikneswaran et al., 2015; Sun Christina; Xu Honggang, 2013)

There are two critical elements that impact the desire to choose a tourism destination: motivational or pull stimulation stimuli and psychological or personal considerations. Motivating or pull factors are unique characteristics that push tourists to satisfy their demands, such as destination image, services, and entertainment facilities (Uysal, 1993). Environmental attitudes, tourist motives to travel, word-of-mouth (WOM), and previous knowledge, inclinations, and pleasure are all examples of psychological influences (Venkatesh, 2006).According to (Alexandris Nikos; Markata Dimitra, 2002), perceived service quality is a strong predictor of behavioral intentions as well as intentions to pick or purchase. The effect of tourists' plans on destination selection plays an important role in tourism marketing by creating demand and supporting visitors in making decisions (Alegre & Cladera, 2009). As a result, clear information and understanding of the elements that impact tourist intention are required in order to create and successfully implement plans and policies that will improve tourism demand. (Mohaidin et al., 2017).

2. Methodology

This qualitative study employed in-depth individual interviews to investigate the influence of User-Generated Content (UGC) on local tourists' destination choice in Morocco. Participants were purposefully selected based on their experience of visiting Morocco and their utilization of UGC platforms for travel planning.

Semi-structured interview guides were developed to explore participants' destination choice processes, their use of UGC platforms, perceptions of UGC information quality, and the impact of UGC on their travel experiences (Table 1). The interviews were conducted face-to-face or online, audio-recorded with participants' consent, and transcribed for analysis. Thematic analysis was employed to identify patterns and themes within the data, allowing for an in-depth exploration of the influence of UGC on destination choice. Trustworthiness was ensured through member checking and peer debriefing, enhancing the credibility of the findings (Table2).

Ethical considerations were maintained throughout the study, with participants' informed consent obtained and their confidentiality and anonymity protected. By employing a qualitative approach and rigorous methodology, this study provides valuable insights into the impact of UGC on tourist destination choice in Morocco, shedding light on the dynamics of UGC utilization and its implications for enhancing the tourist experience.

Table N°1 : Responders Profiles

Respondent	Gender	Position	Work Experience (in years)	Interview Length (in minutes)
1	Female	Content manager	3	20
2	Male	CEO	20	15
3	Female	HR Manager	8	25
4	Male	Graphic Designer	3	15
5	Female	Sales Representative	5	20
6	Male	Project Manager	12	20
7	Female	Travel Agent	4	25
8	Male	Consultant	30	20
9	Female	Event Planner	15	15
10	Male	Responsible Marketing(travel agency)	2	20

Source :Authors

Table N°2 : Results

Dimension	Quotes
Perceived enjoyment	*"When I'm planning a trip, I always consider the perceived enjoyment of the destination. I want to make sure that I'm going somewhere that I'll truly enjoy and have a great time exploring."* Abdelouahab, 45 *"Perceived enjoyment is important to many people when they're choosing a destination. People want to have a good time and make memories that will last a lifetime."* Yamina,34 *"While perceived enjoyment is certainly a factor in my decision-making process, I also consider practical things like cost, safety, and accessibility when selecting a destination."* Oumaima, 36 *"If a destination doesn't have much to offer in terms of enjoyable experiences, then it's unlikely to make it onto my travel list."* Abdessamad, 28
Perceived value	*"Perceived value can be a deciding factor for many people when they're choosing a destination. If a destination has a reputation for being expensive or overpriced, it can turn people off and make them choose a different place to go."* Yamina,34 *"I can't stress enough how important perceived value is when I'm deciding where to travel. I want to be able to enjoy myself without feeling like I'm overspending, and finding a destination that offers great value helps me achieve that."* Zainab, 31 *"For me, the perceived value of a destination is what sets it apart from others. If I feel like I'm getting more for my money, I'm more likely to choose it over other options."* Yasmine, 28
Perceived risks	*"When I'm choosing a destination for my next vacation, one of the main factors I consider is the level of perceived risk associated with the location. If I perceive the risk to be too high, I'll often choose a different destination that I feel is safer."* Oumaima, 36 *"As a solo traveler, I'm always mindful of perceived risks when I'm deciding where to go. I want to feel safe and secure when I'm exploring a new place, so I'm more likely to choose destinations that have a good reputation for safety."* Abdelouahab, 45 *"I think perceived risks definitely play a role in determining whether people choose to travel to certain destinations. If there's a lot of media coverage about crime or political instability in a particular place, it can deter people from going there."* Zainab, 31
Privacy concerns	*"As someone who values their privacy, I'm always mindful of privacy concerns when I'm choosing a destination. I want to go somewhere that respects my privacy and personal space."* Abderrahim, 40 *"As a frequent traveler, I've become more aware of privacy concerns and the potential risks associated with sharing personal information when traveling. I want to make sure that my personal information is protected and that my privacy is respected."* Yamina,34 *"While privacy concerns are certainly important, they're not always at the forefront of*

	my mind when I'm selecting a destination. I'm more focused on things like culture, history, and natural beauty." - Abdessamad, 28
	"Privacy concerns can be a deciding factor for many people when they're choosing a destination. People want to feel safe and secure, both physically and digitally, when they're traveling." – Zakariyae, 39

Source :Authors

3. Analysis and discussion of the results

The analysis of the results reveals several key findings regarding the influence of User- Generated Content (UGC) on tourist destination choice. These findings encompass the dimensions of perceived enjoyment, perceived value, perceived risks, and privacy concerns.

Perceived Enjoyment emerged as a crucial factor in destination selection. Participants emphasized the importance of seeking destinations that would provide enjoyable experiences and the opportunity to create lasting memories. This aligns with the notion that travelers prioritize satisfying and pleasurable experiences when choosing a destination.

Perceived Value played a significant role in participants' decision-making process. They considered factors such as cost and the overall value they would derive from their travel experience. The preference for destinations offering good value for money suggests that travelers are seeking destinations that provide a balance between cost and the quality of the experience.

Perceived Risks were acknowledged as a consideration in destination choice. Participants expressed concerns about safety, crime rates, and political instability, which influenced their decision-making process. This highlights the significance of destination safety and stability in attracting tourists and emphasizes the need for effective risk management strategies.

Privacy Concerns emerged as a factor for some participants. They expressed the desire to choose destinations that respect their privacy and provide a sense of personal space and security during their travels. This suggests that privacy considerations are becoming increasingly important for tourists in the age of digital connectivity and information sharing.

These findings emphasize the multidimensional nature of tourist destination choice, with perceived enjoyment, value, risks, and privacy concerns influencing the decision-making process. Tourism businesses and destination marketers can use these insights to tailor their offerings to meet tourists' preferences and enhance the overall travel experience. Future research can delve deeper into the interrelationships between these dimensions and their impact on tourist behavior, enabling a more comprehensive understanding of destination choice dynamics.

3.1. Theorical implication

This research has the potential to significantly enhance our understanding of how User-Generated Content (UGC) affects tourists' decision-making processes in the realm of tourism theory. As the digital age is rich with information, this study can reveal the evolving dynamics of destination choices, highlighting the complex interplay between peer recommendations, and travel decisions. Furthermore, by investigating UGC's impact on destinations, the study could expand the literature on destination branding and explore to which degree travelers rely on other customer insights to choose their destination, contributing to broader insights on trust-building in online environments ((Ashfaq et al., 2022; Nguyen & Tong, 2023; Shuqair Saleh & Cragg Philip, 2017). Moreover, by analyzing the impact of UGC in specific cultural and geographical contexts, these findings may refine and expand existing models and theories in the field of tourism studies.

3.2. Managerial implications

The research findings offer valuable insights for those in the tourism industry, providing practical implications for destination management organizations and travel companies. By better understanding how user-generated content (UGC) influences travelers' decisions, businesses can adapt their marketing strategies and leverage UGC to promote positive content, engage with travelers on social media, and enhance their brand visibility. The knowledge gained can also be used to curate UGC that aligns with their brand and values, allowing for more effective content curation. The study also provides insights into factors that influence online reviews and ratings, enabling businesses and destinations to monitor and manage their online reputation more effectively. This can help develop strategies for customer engagement and encourage positive experiences, improving the overall online presence of the destination. Furthermore, governments and tourism authorities can consider policies to ensure the authenticity and accuracy of UGC, safeguarding consumers from misleading information and promoting fair competition. The research can also help tourism service providers enhance the customer experience by understanding factors that matter most to travelers, enabling businesses to tailor their offerings to specific customer groups.

Conclusion

The purpose of the study was to look at the effect of user-generated content (UGC) on the intention to choose a trip destination. The influence of UGC on tourist locations was measured using perceived value, perceived risks perceived enjoyment, and perceived concerns. Using a qualitative methód, the suggested model was evaluated among tourist sector managers. The data reveal a favorable link between all UGC components and vacation locations. The current study's

findings emphasized the complexities of choosing a vacation location when an individual is unwittingly exposed to travel-related UGC, as well as evidence that a person's destination selection intention is influenced by both perceived value and perceived hazards.

UGC is a crucial source of information for potential tourists when developing a picture of a certain location. Tourism places must share positive experiences with tourists, which may include tips and comments from other travelers. This study adds to the tourism literature by highlighting the impact of access to UGC on behavioral intentions via destination image. According to the findings, access to UGC has a substantial influence on the cognitive component of image and, ultimately, on the future behavior of visitors.

Limits of the study

While acknowledging the strengths of this study, it is important to address some of its limitations. Two key limitations to consider are:

- Sample Size and Generalizability: The study employed a relatively small sample size of participants, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to a broader population. The specific characteristics and experiences of the selected participants may not fully represent the diverse range of local tourists visiting Morocco. However, the qualitative nature of the study allowed for in-depth exploration of individual perspectives and rich data.

- Research Context: This study focused solely on local tourists visiting destinations in their country Morocco, which may restrict the transferability of the findings to other destinations. Cultural, geographic, and contextual factors specific to Morocco may have influenced participants' perceptions and decision-making processes differently than in other settings. Further research in different cultural contexts could provide a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon and study it from foreign tourist's perspective.

Despite these limitations, this study offers valuable insights into the dimensions of perceived enjoyment, perceived value, perceived risks, and privacy concerns in the context of UGC and tourist destination choice. The qualitative approach allowed for nuanced exploration of participants' experiences and perspectives. By addressing these limitations, researchers can gain a better understanding of the study's scope and implications for future research in similar contexts.

Annex - interview guide

The aim of this interview guide is to conduct a qualitative study on the impact of User-Generated Content (UGC) on destination choice among tourists visiting their country Morocco. This study focuses on key dimensions of destination choice, perceived value, perceived enjoyment, perceived risks, and privacy concerns of local (Moroccan) tourists visiting Morocco. Using in-depth individual interviews, this study will explore the experiences of tourists visiting Morocco regarding the use of UGC to plan their trip, their perception of the information available on social media platforms and online review sites, as well as the impacts of UGC on their overall travel experience. The results of this study will contribute to a better understanding of the impact of UGC on destination choice among local tourists visiting Morocco and identify opportunities for tourism businesses to better use UGC to enhance the domestic tourist experience.

- **How did you choose your destination for your last trip inside Morocco?**
- **Did you use social media platforms or online review sites to help plan your trip inside Morocco? If yes, can you tell me more about your experience and the quality of information you found there?**
- **How did UGC influence your choice of destination for traveling inside Morocco? What types of UGC did you use and how did they contribute to your decision?**
- **How do you evaluate the perceived value of the UGC you used to plan your trip in Morocco?**
- **How did UGC contribute to your travel experience in Morocco? Do you have any specific examples?**
- **Did you encounter any problems or risks during your trip in Morocco related to the use of UGC? If yes, can you tell me more about these issues and how you managed them?**
- **How do you evaluate the privacy and security of your personal data when using social media platforms or online review sites to plan your trip to Morocco?**
- **How do you think social media platforms or online review sites could better use UGC to help tourists plan their trip in Morocco?**
- **Ultimately, would you recommend that other tourists use UGC to plan their trip in Morocco? Why or why not ?**

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