

What Makes UGC More Credible

Shiyang Shen *

Hong Kong Polytechnic University, Hong Kong, 999077, China

* Corresponding author: Shiyang Shen (Email: wuwuguai3@gmail.com)

Abstract: UGC's online media platform is the primary source of related information about tourist destinations before tourism activities. At the same time, more and more customers are likely to be affected by online media information, especially the information published by UGC online media platforms. This paper uses the literature analysis method to integrate the factors affecting the credibility of UGC in the previous literature. The conclusion is to help visitors screen more reliable information and provide more quality content for content publishers to guide.

Keywords: UGC, Source credibility, Content credibility.

1. Introduction

Social media has given everyone a channel of expression, and its development has provided a vehicle for the widespread dissemination of user-generated content (UGC). UGC is the original content consumers publish on social networking platforms or websites without apparent commercial attributes or targets [1]. UGC is, therefore, also one of the latest online news sources for consumers [2]. Consumers increasingly rely on user-generated content to find information about the products or services they want or recommendations from others. When the product contains experience quality, consumers make more complex decisions before buying and need more information to support the purchase decision. Tourism products and services fall into the category of experience products [3]. Therefore, UGC's research in the field of tourism is fundamental. Travelers need accurate and valuable information to judge a product before making a purchase decision. Many contents about the same product must have both positive and negative content. Travelers need to select reliable information from many sources of content. That is, they need to judge the credibility of UGC.

Due to the heightened role of UGC in marketing, UGC is one aspect of a broad phenomenon of inter-consumer communication called word of mouth [4]. It is often used to gain a competitive advantage [5]. As a result, businesses may use incentives for users to publish positive content of goods or services or negative reviews of competitors, creating credibility problems. In addition, on social media, content publishers do not provide their real names. A lack of identity can also doubt the content's credibility.

This study can help customers filter out authentic and credible information better and give content publishers advice on how to publish UGC with quality and credibility. For the tourism industry, it can help merchants know how to better publicize products such as services, make tourists feel real, and stimulate their purchase intention.

2. Definition of Terms

2.1. UGC

UGC refers to posting original content by consumers on social platforms or websites with no apparent commercial attributes or business objectives [1]. UGC is considered to encompass all social media that people use regularly.

Although UGC has no obvious commercial attributes, it is often utilized by the business and marketing sectors. In tourism marketing, UGC is defined as consumers who have arrived at a destination, hotel, or other travel experience and are asked to provide relevant feedback. Also, in the tourism industry, passively generated data or content is considered to be UGC, such as the collection of travel information at search sites and geographic information data when using GPS [6], and these electronic footprints are considered to be UGC in the tourism domain.

2.2. UGC Credibility

In adopting user-generated content (UGC) and considering the unique characteristics of hotel and travel products, it is essential to prioritize credibility. This is because users encounter difficulty assessing viewpoints from unfamiliar individuals [7]. Hovland et al defined credibility as the trustworthiness of the information and its source [8]. UGC is generally considered to have higher credibility than merchant publishing sub-components because the person who publishes the content is perceived to have no commercial goals and does not seek financial gain and is, therefore, better able to provide honest advice. O'Keefe argues that credibility is, to a certain extent, a receiver's judgment of the communicator's credibility to make a judgment [9]. Credibility is seen as a cue on which consumers base their purchasing decisions. Consumers develop positive attitudes toward products when they perceive the source of information to be credible [10]. In addition to this, it also affects the behavioral intentions of consumers. Highly credible sources of information stimulate consumers to have more positive behavioral intentions towards the content or product involved. Therefore, credibility is considered to be related to consumers' perceptions and does not serve as a tool to evaluate reality.

3. Influencing Factors of UGC Credibility

The article summarizes the factors that affect UGC's credibility through reading related documents and divides them into three major categories—the source of credibility, content credibility, and interpersonal relationship.

3.1. Source Credibility

The source's credibility affects consumers' evaluation and judgment of the content; the source is considered the person who published the content. Source credibility is defined as the professionalism of the source or the motivation to provide accurate information. Hovland et al [8] summarized the credibility of information sources into two dimensions: expertise and trustworthiness.

Expertise can be interpreted as the authority and qualifications possessed by the communicator [11]. Consumers' information acceptance behavior is more compliant if a person is perceived to have sufficient knowledge in a particular domain. Information from expert sources is more persuasive than non-experts because the content is expected to be valid. However, due to the lack of identity verification, consumers are always skeptical about whether the content publisher is reliable and whether he has sufficient expertise [12]. In this case, consumers rely more on extrinsic factors, such as the number of views, likes, comments, etc., to make a judgment on whether the content publisher has expertise or not [13].

Hovland et al argued that trustworthiness is the degree of confidence that the consumer has in the communicator to convey the ideas that he believes to be most effective [8]. This is more inclined to beliefs and expectations about the other party's credibility. There is a complexity in the content publisher's motivation to share. In this case, relatability also considers the consumer's confidence in the content publisher's ability to provide information objectively and honestly. In the case of UGC and online reviews, it is easy to be manipulated by the providers of goods or services [14]. For example, posing as a consumer to post false content to enhance their image and discredit competitors; hiring others to post positive reviews about a product or service [7]. Senecal and Nantel point out that consumers are suspicious of any source of information that has a bias toward the beneficiary [15]. These behaviors defeat the purpose of UGC influencing travelers to make purchase decisions behaviors because the content is no longer independent, objective, and unbiased [16]. Consumers perceive the UGC as independent [17], with consistency in content and sentiment to be considered trustworthy. At the same time, the platform for publishing UGC has a certain degree of credibility. The credibility and reputation of the website are factors for consumer judgment. A good website reputation will strengthen consumers' trust in UGC, which will increase the website's reputation.

3.2. Impact of Interpersonal Relationship on Social Media

In the sources of the source and the communicator, the interpersonal influence and relationship intensity also affect credibility [18]. If the content publisher has a high relationship with the receiver, those who have close communication or often pay attention to the content will be considered more credible. Secondly, the similarity of the source also affects consumers' credibility assessment. Similarity refers to the degree of similar attributes of the individual to the source, which is usually considered a similarity between consumers and content publishers. Users will think the content is highly credible when the user and the publisher are similar. As a result, users will also browse past information published by publishers.

3.3. Content Credibility

Ginsca et al categorized credibility into four components, reliability, and quality, in addition to the two aspects of source credibility [19], which are more biased towards content credibility. In this paper, we discuss the influence of UGC on purchase decisions, so the UGC involved is similar to the recommendation of travel products or services. In order to better research content credibility, this paper adds advertising credibility as a theoretical supplement.

Advertising credibility refers to the recipient's perception that the information or claims provided in an advertisement are fair, reliable, and objective [20]. Moreover, it can stimulate the receiver to evaluate the truthfulness of the advertisement [21]. Thus, ad credibility is more concerned with judging the authenticity of ad content (visual and verbal). That is, the content involved is accurately described, and content with integrity will be more readily accepted. Beltramini proposed a definition close to above one "the extent to which an advertisement is capable of evoking sufficient confident in its truthfulness to render it acceptable to consumers" [22]. Advertising credibility has also been categorized into two essential elements: trustfulness and believability [23]. The former refers to the truthfulness and completeness of the message; the latter refers to whether it is consistent with the reality perceived by customers.

According to the above theory, users want recipients to perceive UGC as authentic, and the content may need to be reliable and logical. Detailed research on content characteristics found that the content's objectivity, detailedness, engagement, and readability have an essential impact on credibility [24]. Excessive emotions and extreme expressions will reduce credibility. In addition, UGC with higher consistency has a higher credibility because the content has reached a consensus among the authors. Consumers monitor the consistency of the content when evaluating UGC content. UGC, which is too intensely discussed, also has the potential to be perceived as false content.

4. Conclusion

It is clear from the study that expertise, trustworthiness, interpersonal relationship, and content credibility all significantly affect customers' judgement of UGC credibility. The receiver determines whether the UGC is credible through the interaction of other users, the content publisher's judgment, and the content's assessment.

The main concern under the Credibility/Reliability category is that websites allow companies to pose as independent travelers and post false entries. The second identified concern was related to accuracy and credibility. Regarding the identity of travelers, it is not easy to judge the value of the information made by the publishers if, in general, the profile of the information provider is not known. Others may think that the information posted on UGC websites can be complex to evaluate because other travelers might have different preferences for them. These were classified under the heading of 'Lack of relevance to the user'. Another concern identified the tendency of people to post comments on the UGC only if they had a very positive or negative experience. For example, UGC cannot represent the experience of most tourists. These extreme evaluations do not have guiding suggestions.

Companies need to learn how to interact with this

potentially new generation of opinion leaders rather than turning down UGC and its creators. Businesses have to figure out how to leverage them, not compete, which can attract more customers. Companies can invite influential experts in the field to experience the product or service and issue fair and objective reviews.

For content publishers to want the credibility of the content to be high, they need complete content that is logically apparent. Content needs to describe services and goods and provide tangible evidence objectively. Do not be overly emotional and extreme, which can lead to diminished credibility. If a picture or video can increase interest in content and accessibility, it also enhances credibility on a certain level.

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