Potential and implications for destination management of Online Travel Reviews' argumentative analysis.

The case of domestic and international tourism market in Jiuzhaigou National Park, China.

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Tourism information sources

❖ Approximately every Google search result page has a reference to a **social media** website

❖ Social media websites provide up-to-date contents and have a complex link structure with other websites

❖ Official and unofficial sources are equally important in search engines ranking, and most of the unofficial websites are constituted by **User Generated Contents** (UGC)

❖ Search engines such as Google are dominated by a handful of 'big players' (tripadvisor.com, virtualtourist.com, igougo.com)

❖ **Online Travel Reviews** (OTR) are the prevalent and most accessible source of UGC

Research questions

GENERAL RQs

➢ What is the role of User Generated Contents – and Online Travel Reviews in particular – in the perceived image of a destination/ attraction?

➢ How can we use UGC to improve tourism management practices?

CASE-RELATED RQs

➢ What is the image of Jiuzhaigou National Park according to online "voices"?

➢ Which aspects of Jiuzhaigou management need to be improved?

➢ Are visitors sensitive to environmental issues and eco-friendly solutions adopted in the park?

Characteristics of OTR

❖ Communicative goal: provide **travel advice**

❖ Content: accounts of personal experiences

❖ Authors: usually written by non-professionals; many voices to be compared

❖ Addressee: an audience presumably made up of peers

❖ Textual characteristics: monographic texts of different length, one-way information flow with the possibility to leave comments, writing style is spontaneous and rich in emotions

> How do OTR help prospective tourists to make travel decisions?
> Why are they an influential opinion source?

→ when a 'sensitive' decision has to be taken, word-of-mouth represents a more influential source of information than impersonal or official media sources.

→ OTR are written by people 'in a position to know' (= witnesses)

Destination image and opinionated discourses

❌ Consumer behaviour theories

❌ Literature about destination image

✓ Opinions given by tourists online = ARGUMENTS

≠ information

opinionated information = the "result" of a critical thinking process
(comparison among alternatives, choice, reflection upon experience)

OTR as opinionated discourses

416Kenny
Ontario, Canada

posts: 5

Jiuzhaigou tour
Oct 29, 2014, 11:11 PM

I and my wife are planning to visit China next summer 2015. Jiuzhaigou is a place on our list. We will fly to Chengdu Airport directly. Can anyone recommend which local travel agent is the best in Chengdu City so that we can book our trip tour (including hotel and bus) for 3 days? What is the cost approx?

Thanks

Information, logistic advice

chengduguide
Chengdu, China

posts: 134

2. **Re: Jiuzhaigou tour**
Oct 30, 2014, 1:16 AM

HI,

Your travel time in the summer, is very good.Huanglong is World Heritage , is worth a visit . from Jiuzhaigou Airport to Huanglong, 60 km away. A , from the jiuzhaigou airport to Jiuzhaigou , 90 km .

I suggest that the itinerary is, day1, visit Chengdu Panda Park in the morning, in the afternoon, fly from Chengdu to Jiuzhaigou. day2, visit Jiuzhaigou. day3, visit huanglong. Back to Chengdu.
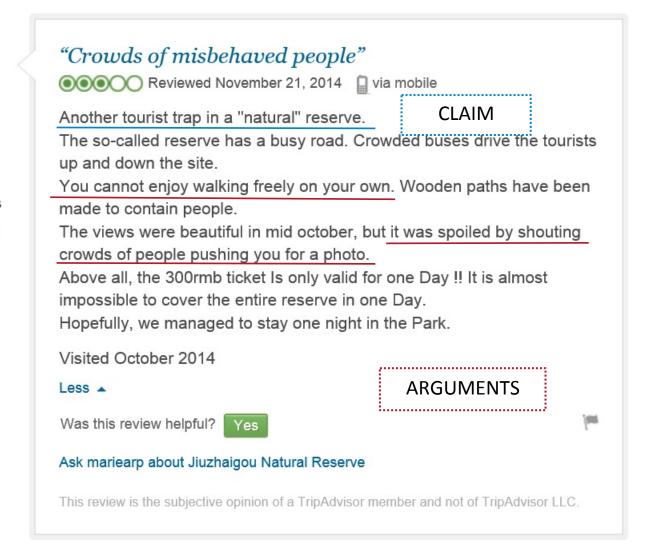
OTR as opinionated discourses

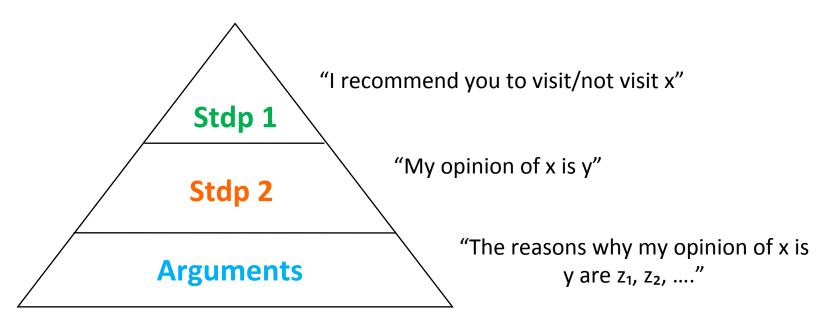mariearp

Contributor

17 reviews

3 attraction reviews

Reviews in 7 cities

"Crowds of misbehaved people"

Reviewed November 21, 2014 via mobile

Another tourist trap in a "natural" reserve.

CLAIM

The so-called reserve has a busy road. Crowded buses drive the tourists up and down the site.
You cannot enjoy walking freely on your own. Wooden paths have been made to contain people.
The views were beautiful in mid october, but it was spoiled by shouting crowds of people pushing you for a photo.
Above all, the 300rmb ticket Is only valid for one Day !! It is almost impossible to cover the entire reserve in one Day.
Hopefully, we managed to stay one night in the Park.

Visited October 2014

Less ▲

ARGUMENTS

Was this review helpful? Yes

Ask mariearp about Jiuzhaigou Natural Reserve

This review is the subjective opinion of a TripAdvisor member and not of TripAdvisor LLC.

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The argumentative structure of OTR

Argumentation is the process of putting forward reasons (*arguments*) for justifying or rejecting a claim (*standpoint*).

It is "a process by which you seek the best possible choices within a context of uncertainty and ambiguity" (Rieke, Sillars and Peterson 2005)

Stdp 1 — "I recommend you to visit/not visit x"

Stdp 2 — "My opinion of x is y"

Arguments — "The reasons why my opinion of x is y are z_1, z_2, …."

References:
Aristotle. *Rhetoric*. + *Topics*.
Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca, 1969. *The new Rhetoric: a treatise on argumentation*
Toulmin, 1969. *The uses of argument*.

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About Jiuzhaigou - location

Located in Northern Sichuan Province in China, Min Shan Mountain
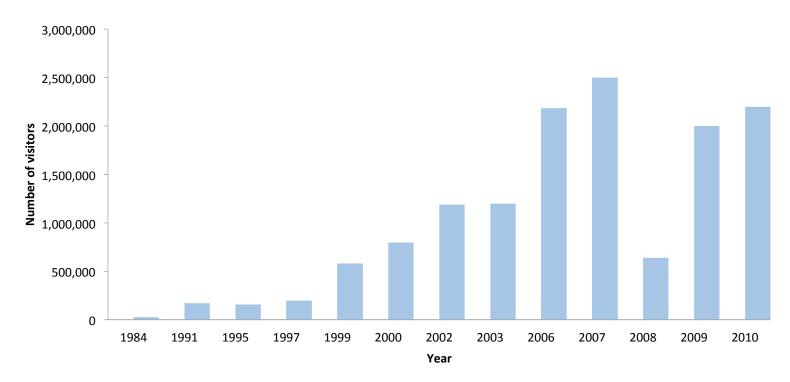
About Jiuzhaigou - context

❖ One of the most famous and popular natural heritage sites in China, listed in 1992 as WHS and as a MAB in 1997

❖ The first Chinese natural reserve to achieve the Green Globe 21 certificate of ecotourism

❖ Its name means "Valley of the 9 villages". Of these 9 villages only 6 remain nowadays, some of which can be visited

About Jiuzhaigou - visitors

N° of tourists: from 27,529 in 1984 to 2.187 millions in 2006

Visitors in Jiuzhaigou National Natural Reserve

About tourism in China

❖ Mass tourism

❖ Large, unmanaged crowds
  ❖ 80/20 rule

❖ High seasonality

❖ Littering, pollution

**NEED
FOR SUSTAINABILITY**

The sample of analysis

❑ **325** OTR on Jiuzhaigou National Park published on Tripadvisor, collected going backwards from 30th October 2014 to reach **10%** of all the reviews published in any language

❑ 198 OTR in English, 127 OTR translated into English from: Spanish, French, Brazilian Portuguese, Dutch, Bahasa Indonesian, Chinese and Japanese

❑ distinguished according to reviewer's country of origin (a) and rating (b)

(a) Reviewer's origin	
China	117
Rest of Asia	87
Europe	40
USA + Canada	39
Oceania	14
Middle East	6
Latina America	5
Africa	1
Unknown	16
Tot.	325

Domestic visitors = **117**
Outbound tourists = **192**

(b) Review rating	
1/5	3
2/5	2
3/5	9
4/5	73
5/5	**238**
Tot.	325

Analytical procedure

1. Analysis performed with UAM Corpus Tool, a software for text annotation and analysis

2. Classification according to review rating and reviewer's country of origin

3. Classification of arguments:

   i. Category building I: distinction between positive and negative arguments

   ii. Category building II: distinction among arguments about tourism in China, arguments about the area outside the park, and arguments about the park itself

   iii. Category building III: bottom-up process until saturation → taxonomy of arguments

TAXONOMY OF ARGUMENTS

Inter-coder reliability

Conducted by two researchers on 15% of randomly selected reviews from the sample.

A value of:

❑ 2 was assigned when the same text segments were annotated with the same category

❑ 1 was assigned when the same text segments were annotated with different categories

❑ 0 was assigned when neither the segment nor the category corresponded

2 = 82,3%

1 = 13,4 %

0 = 4,3 %

Differently annotated segments were discussed to reach an agreement on the category

Distribution of argument types

967 arguments identified and classified:

❖ 663 (69%) positive

❖ 304 (31%) negative

❖ 7 concerned tourism in China

❖ 61 concerned the area outside the park

❖ 899 (93%) concerned the park itself

❖ 316 (32.5%) from domestic visitors

❖ 651 (67%) from outbound visitors

Distribution of argument types

	Type of argument	A. Domestic tourists	B. Foreigners	C. Total
Positive	scenery	87 (37%*)	136 (34.5%**)	223 (35%***)
	colors	49 (21%)	65 (16.5%)	114 (18%)
	atmosphere	29 (13%)	15 (4%)	44 (7%)
	services	17 (7%)	62 (15.5%)	79 (12.5%)
	comparison	15 (6.5%)	44 (11%)	59 (9%)
	Total positive arg.	236	395	**631**
Negative	crowded	19 (31%)	72 (35%)	91 (34%)
	tourists' behavior	6 (10%)	39 (19%)	45 (17%)
	services	15 (24.5%)	24 (11.5%)	39 (14.5%)
	organization	4 (6.5%)	26 (12.5%)	30 (11%)
	Total negative arg.	61	207	**268**

* percentages in column A are calculated against the N° of positive resp. negative arg. about the park advanced by domestic visitors.
** percentages in column B are calculated against the N° of positive resp. negative arg. about the park advanced by foreign visitors.
*** percentages in column C are calculated against the total number of positive resp. negative arguments about the park.

Keywords in positive arguments

DOMESTIC VISITORS

clear world
coloured
landscape
blue
pond
color
feeling
colour
leaves
painting
colours
water
light
dark
eyes
sky
calm
kind
mountains

INTERNATIONAL VISITORS

shades waterfalls
nature
toilet
turquoise
blue
scenery
colours
emerald
streams
views
waters
ponds
clear
lakes
crystal
clean
trees
foliage
well

Ex. - "The landscape is like a *painting*."
- " (…) gives you a *feeling* of some kind of mystical dream"
- "*Dark* blue, light blue, green, *dark* green, is simply a natural painter magic paintbrush flowers out."

Ex. - "The *turquoise* waters were stunning."
- "The waterfalls, the ponds, the lakes, the "*streams are just breath-taking.*"

Keywords in negative arguments
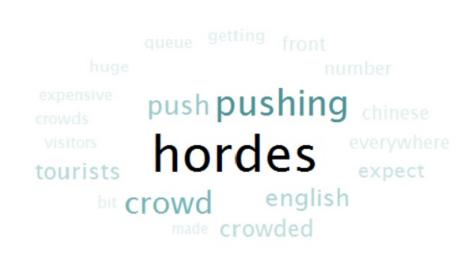
DOMESTIC VISITORS

INTERNATIONAL VISITORS

Ex. - "The entrance and bus tickets are very *expensive*."
- "The *food* in the Park restaurant is a rip and low quality." c

Ex. - "It's a pity you have to share it with *hordes* and *hordes* of screaming, *pushing* and littering fellow tourists."
- "The especially bad thing is that no one speaks *English*."

Environmental awareness

48 arguments identified in the sample:

<u>39 positive</u>

e.g. "Not a single person smoking in sight or litter to be found is testament to its value as one of the last natural sanctuaries."

"Nowadays the scenic area management has many more rules, green buses and wooden boardwalks.»

<u>9 negative</u>

e.g. "MUST go before this nature reserve gets polluted and ruin by tourists."

"Currently, the park does not impose any limits to the number of visitors admitted (...) which we think would be a great move."

Implications for management

For the park's management, OTRs can:

➢ Help to better identify visitors' needs

■ And also to identify specific needs of a certain group vs needs of the majority (i.e. Domestic and International Tourists)

➢ Provide an overview of how visitors perceive certain kinds of facilities, services or behaviours

➢ Provide useful insights on visitors experience both within and outside the park

➢ Know the management's strengths and weaknesses

➢ Expose cases of park law violation (i.e. people providing accommodation within the park or overcharging and frauds)

➢ Demonstrate how visitor are increasingly becoming more environmentally conscious and therefore environmental management is becoming very important

Conclusions

"OTR can not only been employed in private tourism companies but can also serve to evaluate the management of World Heritage Sites. The case of Jiuzhaigou demonstrates how visitors reviews provide useful insights for improving tourism management and the overall visitors experience. They also show how people are becoming increasingly environmentally aware, and how a good environmental management is actually appreciated by tourists."

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