

User-Generated Content Sources in Social Media: A New Approach to Explore Tourist Satisfaction

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Abstract

The study focuses on sources of user-generated content (UGC) in social media: strong-tie sources, weak-tie sources, and tourism-tie sources and their effects on tourist satisfaction with the destination. It is separated into the pre- and post-travel processes. First, it addresses the influences of sources of UGC on tourist expectations about core resources and supporting factors, and then analyzes tourist satisfaction by concentrating on tourist expectations and perceptions of core resources and supporting factors. Findings suggest that UGC sources have an indirect effect on tourist satisfaction since most UGC sources have an influence on tourist expectations, which will later be compared with the real tourist perception. Main conclusions and some recommendations and limitations are provided.

Keywords

user-generated content sources, social media, tourist expectations, tourist perception, tourist satisfaction

Communication through social media is almost unavoidable in daily life today. User-generated content (UGC) in social media is also gradually being acknowledged, as can now be seen from numerous studies published in the literature, although Zeng and Gerritsen (2014) claim it still needs to be explored in greater depth. The growth of UGC in social media has undoubtedly had an impact on the whole traveling process in the tourism sector, that is, the pre-travel process, during traveling, and the post-travel process (Nezakati et al. 2015). More specifically, its influence on the pre-travel period is very important for both tourists and tourism enterprises. UGC related to tourism information on social media is accepted as supporting information for tourists to develop their travel plan and to assist tourists in making a traveling decision (Xiang and Gretzel 2010), and it is considered a highly trustworthy method for searching for reliable and instant information (Yoo and Gretzel 2011; Yoo et al. 2009), since the users can search for information and interact with others with broad dispersion (Nezakati et al. 2015). Moreover, the shared information was produced with the desire to share knowledge or experiences with other people (Nezakati et al. 2015), which may come from friends and family, tourism organizations and enterprises, or even complete strangers. Recommendations from real-life friends via social media can improve the level of trust (Turcotte et al. 2015). Tourism UGC seekers usually need that information to arrange holiday activities (Yoo and Gretzel 2011), and thus such information or information about others' experiences is a good

source for making a decision about traveling (Zeng and Gerritsen 2014).

However, our study concentrates not only on the effect of UGC on the pre-purchase period, but focuses more particularly on sources of UGC in that period and also looks at how it influences the formative process of the tourist's satisfaction after spending time traveling. To this end, we need to pay attention to the expectations, and perceptions of tourists, as satisfaction is a result of a cognitive (Castañeda, Frías, and Rodríguez 2007; Oliver 1993) and an affective process (Oliver 1993). According to Oliver (1980), the cognitive factor is usually described by disconfirmation of expectations theory, which is used to explain the process of customer satisfaction formation as the disconfirmation theory is based on comparative results between the perception of services or products and the expectations (Castañeda, Frías, and Rodríguez 2007; Oliver 1980; Oliver 1993). Regarding the affective factor, Oliver (1989) observed that in the post-purchase period, consumer affect can arise as attribution dependent and, particularly, both stability and controllability have a strong

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influence on the success or failure of the purchase. Positive affects (such as excitement, impression, pleasure, enjoyment) and negative affects (such as instability, uncontrollability, loneliness, monotony) can be attributions for a judgment of satisfaction and dissatisfaction. Consequently, the article is designed, first, to study the influences of sources of UGC from friends or family, acquaintances or unknown people, and tourism organizations on the tourist's expectations. Then it will concentrate on the effects of UGC on the generation of the tourist's satisfaction by focusing on tourists' perception and the traveling experience. However, although we focus on how UGC contributes to the formation of the expectation, we nevertheless remain aware in each moment of what the theory of the image states in relation to this question. When the expectation is forming itself, it not only forms from the information obtained through social media, but also forms through other aspects such as similar previous experiences.

Accordingly, the main purpose of the study is to analyze how UGC sources in social media influence tourist satisfaction by examining some important factors: tourist expectations and tourist perceptions of the destination.

Theoretical Framework

According to Oliver (1980), the formative process of customer satisfaction is usually referred to the expectancy disconfirmation paradigm. The expectation/disconfirmation model says that before committing any purchase, consumers will create expectations on that product or service (Montero and Avilés 2010). Consequently, applying for tourism sector, tourists usually develop the expectations on the offered services. Once they have experience on that service, they will compare the real experiences with those expectations. Thus, it can explain that the level of the expectations and the level of the real experience's perception will be the factors that regulate the level of tourist satisfaction. If the overall experience with those services or general performance goes beyond or meets the previous expectations, then the tourist will be satisfactory. If not, the tourist possibly will be dissatisfied (Montero and Avilés 2010).

Researchers recognize the existence of various classes of expectations, among which growing interest is drawn to two particular types: normative and predictive expectations. On the one hand, the notion of normative (should) expectations was developed in the service quality literature as an element of the SERVQUAL instrument. This kind of expectation generates customers' beliefs related to what a service provider has to offer, and the customers use it as standards to compare their perceptions of service quality (Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry 1985). On the other, there is the concept of predictive (will) expectations, which emerged in the customer satisfaction literature as a component of the expectation-disconfirmation model (Oliver 1980). In the framework of the expectation-disconfirmation model, predictive expectation is

an experience-based prediction or anticipation of what probably happens in the future.

Bohlmann et al. (2006) complement the dynamic models of satisfaction formation by gathering the effects of social influence which can progressively cause satisfaction. The evidences prove that comments of other members in a buying-group discussion determine the satisfaction judgments of individual group members. Social influence groups represent people who often familiarize themselves to the membership groups and others in forming their behavior and evaluation (Bearden and Etzel 1982). According to Kaplan and Miller (1987), social influence groups can approach to the members and others with regard to informational and normative influences. When information is viewed as new information during a group discussion and product or service assessments, an informational influence on the judgments of group members will be generated. Therefore, the informational influence acts as evidence about reality that is based on the recognition of information from others (Kaplan and Miller 1987).

In relation to normative influence, Kaplan and Miller (1987) said it depends on a wish to comply with the expectations of others. Moreover, under the concept of normative influence, the group influence is based on social pressure of others especially when the pressure is applied in the identifiable group members (Postmes et al. 2001). If individuals admire the opinions of other group members, he or she will predict other members' judgments and adapt their own opinions to the perceived group norms (Bohlmann et al. 2006). Finally, individuals will desire to have any judgments approved by other group members.

Similarly to social reference group theory, a reference group can be a person or set of people who has a powerful influence on an individual's behavior (Bearden and Etzel 1982) and, more especially, it usually refers to one's purchase behavior in a particular set of circumstances (Yang et al. 2007). According to Bearden and Etzel (1982), group references can be of three different natures: informational influence, utilitarian influence, and value-expressive influence. Especially, the informational influence is usually accepted as credible information for making a decision.

Furthermore, another supporting theory that is considered in our study is electronic word of mouth (eWOM). Word of mouth (WOM) is from the opinion leader who interprets message contents and reveals for others, such as opinion seekers (Litvin, Goldsmith, and Pan 2008). Two types of sources of WOM are classified: strong-tie sources are WOM from friends, family, or relatives, and weak-tie sources are WOM from acquaintances or unknown people (Duhan et al. 1997). Consequently, eWOM, which refers to the contents posted on Internet, can also be in a strong- or weak-tie format. Both sources of WOM are evaluated as truthful information, since it was provided voluntarily and for nothing in exchange (Yoo and Gretzel 2011). Moreover, it is more honest than information provided by tourism organizations or

tourism establishments (Parra Lopes et al. 2011). Luo and Zhong (2015) explained the effect of eWOM on the receiver, who is affected by two aspects, namely, the effects on the receiver's attitude and on the receiver's willingness to purchase, especially when the receivers lack knowledge or experience.

Literature Review

User-Generated Content in the Pre-Travel Period

At present, researchers are paying more attention to UGC in the tourism industry, since UGC on online communities is one of the more credible techniques for sharing information or pictures from other users about their own experiences and other information (Nezakati et al. 2015). A large body of evidence reflects the interest in the effects of UGC in the pre-travel period, for example, studies related to tourists' purchasing decisions or intention to purchase (Nezakati et al. 2015; Cox et al. 2009; Gretzel and Yoo 2008), developing a traveling plan (Luo and Zhong 2015).

A purchase decision for any intangible product, and particularly tourism products, usually depends on the information available. UGC aims to be valuable information as such information is made up of different opinions, personal commentaries, and travel experiences, which are created by the users or tourists themselves (Xiang and Gretzel 2010; Luo and Zhong 2015; Mucan and Ozelturkay 2014). Since the users or tourists themselves are the ones who generate and update all contents voluntarily and independently on social media (Sigala, Christou, and Gretzel 2012), the UGC in social media has been accepted as good supporting information for tourists to assist them in making a decision, particularly for traveling to a specific destination (Nezakati et al. 2015; Zeng and Gerritsen 2014; Del Chiappa 2011; Xiang and Gretzel 2010).

UGC is used not only as an information base for any tourism purchase decision, but also as supporting information in arranging, organizing, and planning a trip (Zeng and Gerritsen 2014; Nezakati et al. 2015). However, the study by Ayeh, Au, and Law (2013) found that most Internet users do not use UGC to plan their travels, yet little is presently known regarding the relevant factors determining UGC usage for the specific reason of travel planning. As tourism is an experiential good, tourists cannot perceive the quality of tourism products in advance, and so interpersonal communication becomes a unique way to reduce risks in the development of the travel plan (Luo and Zhong 2015). Social media also allow users to exchange information, consult all their doubts, and discuss interests with other users (Luo and Zhong 2015), particularly with those who have already experienced that destination. This enables them to seek and reserve the best prices, places to visit, accommodation, and transportation for the trip (Del Chiappa 2011; Nezakati et al. 2015) via personal commentaries, content sharing, and private life broadcasting (Mucan and

Ozelturkay 2014). More especially, when these commentaries turn into eWOM, they will have more influence on the travel planning and decision process (Nezakati et al. 2015). These actions nowadays can be carried out whenever and wherever it is necessary through Internet-connected devices.

User-Generated Content Sources

As Zeng and Gerritsen (2014) mentioned, UGC research is still in its early stages, and there are some aspects that still need to be explored, such as the sources of UGC. Many studies investigate UGC sources based on social media applications. For instance, there are studies that analyze the influence or the importance of UGC on tourism in Facebook (Isacsson and Gretzel 2011), Twitter (Sotiriadis and van Zyl 2013; Hay 2010), Tripadvisor (Amaral, Tiago, and Tiago 2014; Ayeh, Au, and Law 2013) and Youtube (Kim 2012). Some research compares different applications (Smith, Fischer, and Yongjian 2012). However, there is a lack of literature about UGC sources based on UGC contributors or UGC writers.

Regarding the source of WOM, the seminal study by Granovetter (1973) or the study by Duhan et al. (1997) analyzed and classified WOM sources based on the relationships between the message sender and the receiver. Although Wang et al. (2016) commented that the extent of different kinds of social ties may overlap and could influence the quality of recommendations, different studies still use their classification as the basis for their research (Duhan et al. 1997; Wang et al. 2016). Moreover, despite the fact that these studies were conducted in an offline environment, different authors like Francalanci and Hussain (2015), Wang and Chang (2013), Wang et al. (2016), and Dickinson et al. (2017) ensure they can be used in an online environment to discover tourist behavior. Consequently, UGC in social media that works as eWOM can also adapt the classification of WOM in the same way as the nature of WOM sources. Therefore, the contributors of UGC related to tourism can be categorized as strong ties (friends and family), weak ties (acquaintances and strangers), and tourism ties (tourism organizations and tourism establishments).

Strong-Tie Sources. According to previous authors, strong ties refer to people who have a high frequency of interaction, such as friends or family (Wang et al. 2016; Granovetter 1973). Two different periods of study confirmed at the same point that strong-tie relationships are enduring, and are often interactions with emotional or affective implications (Dickinson et al. 2017; Duhan et al. 1997). Presi, Saridakis, and Hartmans (2014) claimed that UGC on social media can be supplied by friends or family in real life and it affects any tourism purchase decision making, including planning the trip. Based on the social influence in the group, the shared information from one member—here, real friends or family members—will influence the rest of the members, and especially the members' judgments, since this information is

accepted as evidence about reality (Kaplan and Miller 1987). Furthermore, the information from friends or family is usually prepared through personal communication or an exchange among the group, and the communications among the users are considered a qualified information transmission (Sigala 2008). Thus, it confirms the idea that tourism experience information from strong-tie sources has an effect in the pre-traveling period.

Weak-Tie Sources. Based on the seminal research conducted by Granovetter (1973), weak ties have a lower frequency of interactions than strong ties. They refer to the relationships that are developed with others who are outside the close-knit group and usually have different resources and different information, such as acquaintances (Granovetter 1973). In addition, as our case addresses an online environment, the weak-tie sources are also related to strangers or people unknown to us. Dickinson et al. (2017) supported this aspect, as they claimed that a tourist may receive advice from reviews or comments from someone with whom he or she has had no social contact before. Thus, the information from weak-tie sources is significant as it provides new information or innovation to distribute over social networks (Wang et al. 2016).

Tourism-Tie Sources. Tourism-tie sources are usually generated by tourism entities such as tourism organizations, tourism associations, or tourism enterprises. The information from governmental tourism organizations is typically considered to be credible and reliable (Cox et al. 2009). Hays, Page, and Buhalis (2013) claimed that information from destination marketing organizations (DMOs) via virtual travel communities strengthens the contents by endowing them with more range, richness, timeliness, and reliability than traditional methods, whether it is a photo, video, or links on their own social media pages. Moreover, information via tourist entities' social media is usually (1) factual/historical information, such as information about local festivals and the history of the tourist attractions at the destination, or (2) opinions/reviews from the public, thus allowing for interactivity among tourists, and the entities can respond to tourists' questions and inquiries (Hays, Page, and Buhalis 2013). Although tourism organizations realize that the growth of user generated content would have a strong potential for tourism organizations (Akehurst 2009), since it is low-cost and can reach a global market (Hays, Page, and Buhalis 2013), its development is still lacking in this sector. Academically, few studies have focused on how tourism organizations develop social media to market destinations and to engage with possible tourists (Hays, Page, and Buhalis 2013).

The Comparison of Strong Ties, Weak Ties, and Tourism Ties

As expectations are formed by the information received, they affect decision making. The UGC from weak-tie and tourism-tie sources can also have a strong influence on

expectations. However, the extent of different social ties may influence the quality of recommendations (Wang et al. 2016).

Previous studies have confirmed that information from strong-tie sources has a greater influence in the emotional or affective aspect (Dickinson et al. 2017; Duhan et al. 1997). The stories posted and shared on social media by real-life friends are perceived as coming from an opinion leader (Turcotte et al. 2015), especially affective opinion. Duhan et al. (1997) supported the idea that as they are strong ties, and they are more expected to be high-quality sources of information regarding affective characteristics. Moreover, suggestions from offline friends via social media can increase the level of trust and also attract other people to follow news in the future (Turcotte et al. 2015). Furthermore, in relation to organizing and planning trips, trust and intention in recommendations are some of the incentives that encourage people to use social media in planning their trips, especially so in the case of recommendations and encouragement coming from friends and family (Parra Lopez et al. 2011).

Regarding the weak-tie and tourism-tie sources, the information is more likely to be related to the cognitive or informational aspect than strong-tie sources, as it provides new information or innovation (Wang et al. 2016). More especially, tourism ties provide more factual information about the destination and experiences from previous tourists (Hays, Page, and Buhalis 2013). Furthermore, the theory of Duhan et al. (1997) supported the notion that weak ties tend to be more conducive to information distribution and are more commonly used for information searching than strong ties, as they are able to provide more and better information as regards technical and performance-oriented aspects.

Since the weak-tie and tourism-tie sources are not from familiar people, social reference group theory is considered to analyze these aspects. Bearden and Etzel (1982) explained that the reference group is used for comparative and normative influences in purchase decision making. As commonly occurs with UGC in online communities, the members of the online community will exchange or share information or previous experiences, which allows other users to compare with still other users. Moreover, in online environments, influencers pay an important role in tourist decision making when it comes to choosing the final destination (Francalanci and Hussain 2015) as they have many followers or audiences on social media, and they often share or forward the contents again (Francalanci and Hussain 2015). It was found that 24% of people who use social media follow the influencers, and 62% consider that the comments of influencers affect their expectations and purchasing decision (IAB and Elogia 2017). This reflects the idea that online reputation affects confidence in products or services, particularly in the social media they are involved in (IAB and Elogia 2017). Therefore, generally, the roles of influencers seem to explain the relationships with weak-tie sources, although some studies demonstrate that it can apply to strong and weak ties, depending on the knowledge levels and the connections with the

influencer in social media environments (Francalanci and Hussain 2015).

User-Generated Content Sources and Tourist Expectations about Destinations

An evaluation in choosing a destination for traveling needs to concern in different aspects. It was found bidirectional relationships between expectations and image of a destination, that image formation can effect on experience expectations (Gartner 1989), and at the same time, the expectations is also one of factors as influential on the image (Mayo and Jarvis 1981). According to Hanlan and Kelly (2005), during the pre-trip stage, the development of image in destination has multistage process. The potential travelers may develop an initial image of a destination by exploring information sources beyond the control of DMO. Moreover, it is claimed that having experience by visiting to a destination will conduct further evolution of the image destination.

After receiving some information, people normally create expectations before deciding to purchase products or services. As Evrard (1993) stated, expectations are beliefs related to product or service characteristics in the pre-purchase and preconsumption of that product or service. Based on disconfirmation of expectations theory, factors that are external to consumers, such as the Internet, can create expectations (Castañeda, Frías, and Rodríguez 2007). Therefore, having received information from UGC on social media, tourists will be able to decide where to travel, thus creating expectations about the destination, and select the place that is the best-matched to what they expected. In addition, based on disconfirmation of expectations theory, the expectations will also be used as a variable in evaluating tourist satisfaction by using a comparative judgment once they consume traveling products/services. Oliver (1980) explained that expectations are ideas that act as a frame of reference when we need to make a comparative judgment. A negative disconfirmation appears when the outcome is lower than expected or it demonstrates dissatisfaction. Conversely, if, at the same reference point, the result is higher than expected, a positive disconfirmation will emerge and this reflects satisfaction (Oliver 1980). Thus, tourists will compare things from what they perceive at the destination and what they expected to get from the destination.

However, expectations about the destinations can be varied, depending on the destinations' characteristics. Different researchers categorize general components of the tourism destination in similar characteristics. For example, Jackins (1999) refers to physical or functional characteristics and psychological characteristics. Crouch and Ritchie (1999) separated the destination into core resources and attractor, destination management, supporting factors and resources, and qualifying determinants, which Crouch (2011) later expanded by adding destination policy, planning, and development aspects.

Adapting from the references above, two main characteristics of tourism destination are analyzed in our case: core resources and supporting/psychological factors. Core resources, on the one hand, are analyzed as the main attractions of the destination. They are the primary reasons and motivations that probable tourists use in deciding to travel to one destination rather than another (Crouch and Ritchie 1999). Most of them are physical or tangible components. These characteristics include culture and history (unique, interesting culture/history, artwork, handicrafts, performances, etc.), activities and special events (different types of tourism programs, festivals, events such as sports competitions, exhibitions, etc.), and tourism superstructures (well-known architecture, popular cuisine, accommodation facilities, food services, transportation facilities, etc.). Supporting/psychological factors are usually abstract attributes (Jackins 1999), which consist of hospitality (friendliness of the local people, community's attitudes toward visitors), service quality (reliable, responsive and highly customized service for visitors), and safety/security (visitors feel safe and secure at all times during their stay).

Consequently, to achieve the objectives of the research in relation to the influence of sources of UGC, taking into account strong ties, weak ties, and tourism ties, via social media and tourist expectations on destination characteristics, the following hypotheses are proposed:

Hypothesis_{1,1'}: User-generated contents from strong-tie sources in social media have a direct and significant influence on tourists' expectations about the core resources of a destination.

Hypothesis_{1,2'}: User-generated contents from strong-tie sources in social media have a direct and significant influence on tourists' expectations about the supporting factors of a destination.

Hypothesis_{2,1'}: User-generated contents from weak-tie sources in social media have a direct and significant influence on tourists' expectations about the core resources of a destination.

Hypothesis_{2,2'}: User-generated contents from weak-tie sources in social media have a direct and significant influence on tourists' expectations about the supporting factors of a destination.

Hypothesis_{3,1'}: User-generated contents from tourism-tie sources in social media have a direct and significant influence on tourists' expectations about the core resources of a destination.

Hypothesis_{3,2'}: User-generated contents from tourism-tie sources in social media have a direct and significant influence on tourists' expectations about the supporting factors of a destination.

Tourist Satisfaction in the Post-Travel Period

The influence of UGC in social media on satisfaction is more important than the traditional interpretation proposed by the

expectancy disconfirmation paradigm. Montero and Avilés (2010) claimed that, according to the assimilation theory (Sherif and Hovland 1961), once individuals realize discrepancies between performance and previous beliefs, they face a psychological conflict, and then they tend to adapt perceptions to their expectations to reduce or get rid of that stress. This means that the expectations do not directly influence satisfaction but modulate it through the tourist's perception. Assimilation theory refers to compliance with normative influence in groups that is based on a wish to comply with the expectations of others (Kaplan and Miller 1987).

The positive version of assimilation theory mentions that individuals tend to overadjust satisfaction (slight positive disconfirmation) when there are high expectations. In the opposite, individuals have a tendency to slightly underadjust when there are lower expectations. Therefore, the traditional interpretation is that generating high expectations can be counterproductive if they do not correspond to reality, a view that we question. Spreng and Page (2003) found that expectations have a notable positive incidence on the perceptions of performance, as anticipated by assimilation theory. These results are consistent with past research (Yi 1990). In this respect, it would be interesting to demonstrate whether assimilation theory can also accomplish this with the UGC in social media. Therefore, the following hypotheses were proposed.

Hypothesis_{4,1}: The tourist expectations about the core resources of a tourist destination have a direct and significant influence on tourist perceptions of the core resources of the destination.

Hypothesis_{4,2}: The tourist expectations about the core resources of a tourist destination have a direct and significant influence on tourist perceptions of the supporting factors of the destination.

Hypothesis_{5,1}: The tourist expectations about the supporting factors of a tourist destination have a direct and significant influence on tourist perceptions of the core resources of the destination.

Hypothesis_{5,2}: The tourist expectations about the supporting factors of a tourist destination have a direct and significant influence on tourist perceptions of the supporting factors of the destination.

Satisfaction is a judgment that product or service itself, in our case a tourism product or service attribute, offered a satisfactory level of consumption-related fulfillment, along with levels of under- or overfulfillment (Oliver 1993). It has been suggested that not only cognitions (expectations and performance) but also emotions can play a significant role in satisfaction formation (Oliver 1993; Del Bosque and San Martín 2008; Montero and Avilés 2010). Regarding to the cognitive (technical) nature of satisfaction, it focuses on various comparison standards and feedback since the beginning of product performance, the emotional (artful) nature of satisfaction

handle the determining level of consumer satisfaction (Ekinci, Dawes, and Massey 2008). Thus, the cognitive and affective views suggest that satisfaction is affected by the individual's cognitive judgments and emotions obtained from the consumption experience.

Hypothesis_{6,1}: The tourist perceptions of the core resources of a tourist destination have a direct and significant influence on tourist satisfaction.

Hypothesis_{6,2}: The tourist perceptions of the supporting factors of a tourist destination have a direct and significant influence on tourist satisfaction.

Based on the above rationale, the model of the study was designed as shown in Figure 1.

Research Methodology

Research Design

As the main research objective is to analyze the influence of UGC sources on tourist satisfaction, to fulfill this objective the research needs to focus on the periods both before and after traveling. Regarding the pretraveling period, an empirical study of Narangajavana et al. (2017) confirmed the relationships between the UGC received on social media and tourist expectations; however, it did not consider the UGC sources. Subsequently, our study has concentrated on the influences of UGC sources on tourist expectations by classifying UGC sources into three groups applied from WOM literatures (strong ties, weak ties, and tourism ties). The research has also focused on the effect on tourist expectations regarding two groups of tourist destinations: core resources and supporting factors. The relationships between the tourists' expectations, perceptions, and satisfaction in the post-traveling period were also examined.

Two conceptual definitions based on Kim (2014), Crouch (2011), and Crouch and Ritchie (1999), Vengsayi (2008) were provided as a reference to allow the same interpretation. One is the core resources, referring to the main attractions that motivate future tourists to visit and choose one destination rather than another. They are likely to be more existing or substantial objects or facts. This includes culture and history, activities and special events, and tourism superstructures. The other one is the supporting factors, which are likely to be more abstract, attitudes and emotions. This is indirectly associated with the attractiveness of the destination, for example, its relevance to local people, the performance of tourism establishments, and general image of the destination. Thus, we are referring specifically to hospitality, service quality, and safety and security.

The empirical study was conducted during a period of 16 weeks in the winter of 2015 in Valencia, the third largest city in Spain. Approximately 1,500 tourists were asked to collaborate by answering the questionnaire. However, the

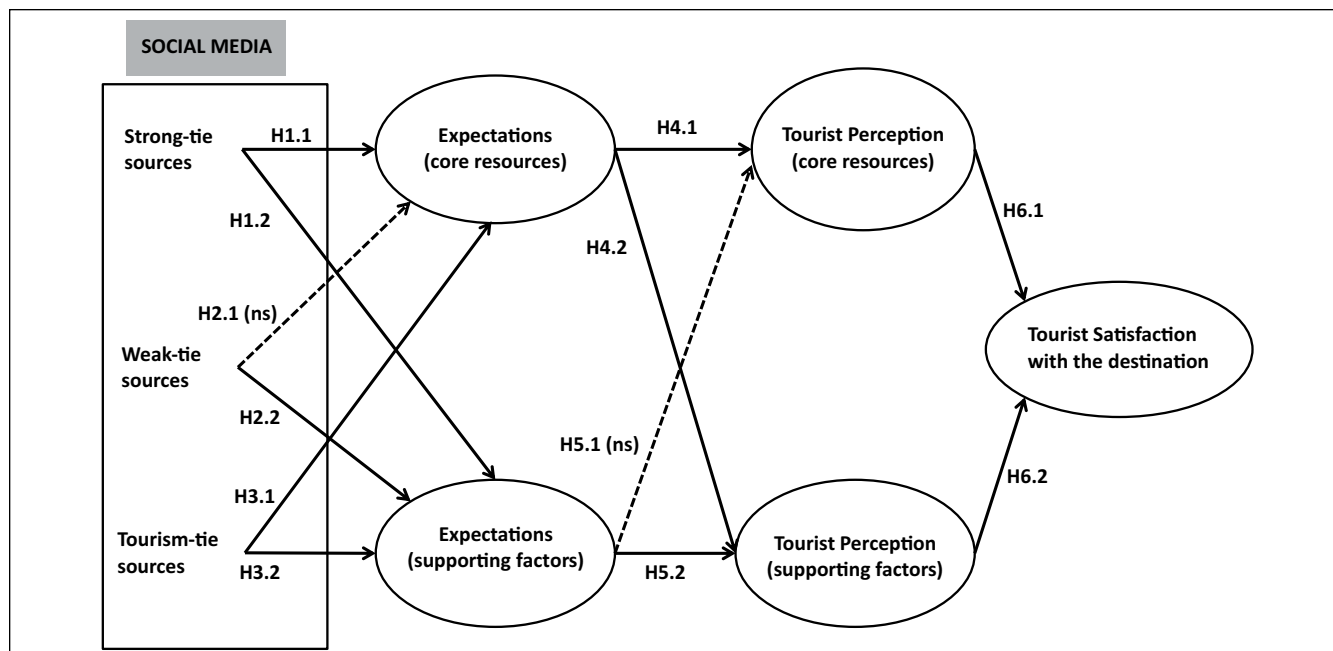


Figure 1. The model of the study.

final valid response rate was about 25%, as the questionnaire was designed to collect data only from tourists who have received tourist information on social media before traveling and have finished their trip to Valencia. After screening and eliminating questionnaires with mistakes, the total effective sample size was 375, with a sampling error of the study in a range of $\pm 5\%$ (confidence interval = 95%, and $p = q = 0.5$). As Pappas (2016) mentioned, when the sample size is unknown for a population, the maximum acceptable sampling error should not higher than 5% when the confidence level is at least 95%.

Measures

Following the recommendations of Dawes (2008), the choice of a scale format is suitable for indicators of customer feelings such as satisfaction surveys, especially 5- or 7-point scales. Hence, a questionnaire with 5-point Likert-type scales (from 1 = *absolutely disagree* to 5 = *absolutely agree*) and multiple-choice questions was developed. Different items were used to measure variables and were modified based on different studies in the literature as follows:

Social Media Source. This variable is based on the categories of eWOM groups in Duhan et al. (1997) and was also adapted from different studies such as Presi, Saridakis, and Hartmans (2014), Parra Lopez et al. (2011), Cox et al. (2009), and Hays, Page, and Buhalis (2013). It was measured by the level of frequency of receiving traveling information by separating the sources into three groups: family or friends, acquaintances or strangers, and tourism organizations or tourism

establishments. On the scales, 1 represents *never receive traveling information* and 5 represents *always receive traveling information*.

Tourist Expectations and Tourist Perceptions on Both Core Resources and Supporting Factors of the Destination. These variables were adapted from Kim (2014), Crouch (2011), Crouch and Ritchie (1999), and Vengesai (2008). A scale of 1 to 5 was used, where 1 represents *very low* and 5 represents *very high*. There are 12 items altogether, separated into three items that were the same for the core resources in the two perspectives (expectations and perception), and another three items that were also the same for the supporting factors in the two perspectives: expectations and perception. Regarding tourist expectations and tourist perceptions on core resources, the measure was composed of three items: “culture and history,” “activities and special events,” and “tourism superstructures.” In relation to tourist expectations and tourist perceptions regarding supporting factors, the items were composed of “hospitality,” “service quality,” and “safety or security.”

Tourist Satisfaction. Six items for measuring satisfaction were adapted from Forgas et al. (2012), and Veasna, Wu, and Huang (2013), where the scales used 1 as *absolutely disagree* and 5 as *absolutely agree*. Five of the items were “In general I am satisfied with my trip,” “Traveling to the destination always meet my expectations,” “I am pleased that I have decided to visit Valencia,” “I am delighted with Valencia,” and “My visit to the destination exceeded my expectations.”

Table 1. Analysis of Dimensionality, Reliability and Validity of All Measurement Scales (Fully Standard Solution).

	Factor loading	t-value
Expectations (after receiving information from social media) (Core Resources) (AVE = 0.60, CR = 0.78)		
Culture and History (unique, interesting culture/history; artwork, handicrafts, performances, etc.).	0.72	10.00
Activities and Special Events (different types of tourism programs, festivals, events such as sports competitions, exhibitions, etc.).	0.74	10.88
Tourism Superstructures (well-known architecture, popular cuisine, accommodation facilities, food services, transportation facilities, etc.).	0.74	9.24
Expectations (after receiving information from social media) (Supporting Factors) (AVE = 0.61, CR = 0.78)		
Hospitality (friendliness of the local people, the Valencian Community's attitudes toward visitors).	0.73	12.61
Service Quality (reliable, responsive and highly customized service for visitors).	0.83	15.18
Safety/Security (visitors feel safe and secure at all times during their stay).	0.65	8.46
Perception (after having the real experience) (Core Resources) (AVE = 0.61, CR = 0.78)		
Culture and History (unique, interesting culture/history; artwork, handicrafts, performances, etc.).	0.74	10.84
Activities and Special Events (different types of tourism programs, festivals, events such as sports competitions, exhibitions, etc.).	0.69	11.86
Tourism Superstructures (well-known architecture, popular cuisine, accommodation facilities, food services, transportation facilities, etc.).	0.78	13.60
Perception (after having the real experience) (Supporting Factors) (AVE = 0.56, CR = 0.74)		
Hospitality (friendliness of the local people, the Valencian Community's attitudes toward visitors).	0.68	11.82
Service Quality (reliable, responsive and highly customized service for visitors).	0.8	15.87
Safety/Security (visitors feel safe and secure at all times during their stay).	0.62	9.33
Satisfaction with your trip to Valencia (AVE = 0.70, CR = 0.90)		
In general I am satisfied with my trip	0.78	13.12
Traveling to the destination always meet my expectations	0.71	13.17
I am pleased that I have decided to visit Valencia	0.80	15.80
I am delighted with Valencia	0.90	23.17
My visit to the destination exceeded my expectations	0.84	20.19

Note: The model fits: $\chi^2 = 124.8092$, $df = 108$, $p = .12838$, RMSEA = .022, CFI = .991, NNFI = 0.989. AVE = average variance extracted; CR = composite reliability.

Results and Discussion

The Reliability, Dimensionality, and Validity of the Measurement Model

Basically, the measurement model first needs to be submitted to SEM analysis, as this will demonstrate the reliability, dimensionality and (convergent and discriminant) validity of the measurement model (Garrigós-Simón, Palacios-Marqués, and Narangajavana 2008). Therefore, CFA was selected to examine and to confirm that the selected model constructs are the most suitable ones.

With the CFA, six dimensions were obtained. As can be viewed in Table 1, the probability associated with chi-squared arrives a value higher than .05 (.12838), demonstrating an overall good fit of the scale (Jöreskog and Sörbom 1996). The convergent validity is demonstrated in two ways. First, because the factor loadings are above 0.6 in every item (Hair et al. 2006) and significant because the t -values of all the items are between 3 and 17, higher than 1.96 (Veasna, Wu, and Huang 2013); and second, because the average variance extracted (AVE) for each of the factors is higher than 0.5 (Fornell and Larcker 1981). The reliability of the scale is

demonstrated because the composite reliability indices in each of the dimensions obtained are over 0.6 (Bagozzi and Yi 1988).

We determined the discriminant validity of the measured constructs by comparing the square root of the AVE with each Pearson correlation between each pair of constructs (see Table 2). The results are in accordance with what Fornell and Larcker (1981) mentioned, and demonstrate that the square root of the AVE estimates is higher than the corresponding interconstruct correlation estimates; therefore, there is discriminant validity.

Hypothesis Results and the Fit of the Model

To answer the research hypotheses and to analyze the fits of the model, we examined the causal relationships (see Table 3). First, the relationships between three groups of social media UGC resources (strong ties, weak ties, and tourism ties) and the expectations about the core resources and the supporting factors at the destination were analyzed. The results agree with the literature that strong-tie sources of UGC have a direct and significant effect on expectations (both core and supporting resources of the destination) with $\beta = 0.20$ ($t = 2.60$) and $\beta = 0.23$ ($t = 3.31$), respectively, so H1.1 and H1.2 are accepted.

Table 2. Discriminant Validity of All Constructs Considered for the Model.

	1	2	3	4	5
1. Expectations (Core Resources)	.78				
2. Expectations (Supporting Factors)	.65	.78			
3. Perception (Core Resources)	.66	.40	.78		
4. Perception (Supporting Factors)	.37	.70	.69	.75	
5. Satisfaction With Your Trip to Valencia	.23	.34	.64	.58	.84

Note: Below the diagonal—correlation estimated between the factors. Diagonal—square root of AVE.

Table 3. Structural Model Relationships Obtained.

	Relationship	t-value	Results
H1.1 UGC strong-tie sources → Expectations (Core Resources)	0.20	2.60	Supported
H1.2 UGC Strong-tie sources → Expectations (Supporting Factors)	0.23	3.31	Supported
H2.1 UGC Weak-tie sources → Expectations (Core Resources)	0.06	0.90	Not supported
H2.2 UGC Weak-tie sources → Expectations (Supporting Factors)	0.17	2.86	Supported
H3.1 UGC Tourism-tie sources → Expectations (Core Resources)	0.24	2.86	Supported
H3.2 UGC Tourism-tie sources → Expectations (Supporting Factors)	0.16	2.22	Supported
H4.1 Expectations (Core Resources) → Perception (Core Resources)	0.53	3.90	Supported
H4.2 Expectations (Core Resources) → Perception (Supporting Factors)	0.24	2.60	Supported
H5.1 Expectations (Supporting Factors) → Perception (Core Resources)	0.02	0.36	Not supported
H5.2 Expectations (Supporting Factors) → Perception (Supporting Factors)	0.72	6.70	Supported
H6.1 Perception (Core Resources) → Satisfaction	0.51	5.71	Supported
H6.2 Perception (Supporting Factors) → Satisfaction	0.29	4.34	Supported

Note: Model fit: $\chi^2 = 165.8905$, $df = 159$, $p = .33789$, RMSEA = .013, CFI = .996, NNFI = .996.

This can be explained by the social influence theory, whereby the opinions or perspectives of one member affect the rest of the members of the same group. Consequently, the expectations about the destination of a member can be created by the shared information of other members. As more members agree with this opinion, it tends to easily predispose the rest of the members to have the same perspectives.

In relation to the weak-tie sources of UGC and expectations, the previous literature referred to reference group theory, according to which the information received from the reference group in the process of creating expectations and making decisions is fundamental, as it works as comparative and normative references. However, in our case, we specifically examined the expectations about core resources and supporting factors separately. Yet, we found that the theory cannot be applied with the influences of weak-tie sources of UGC on the expectations about core sources, since the results demonstrate $\beta = 0.06$ ($t = 0.90$); in contrast, it does affect the expectations about the supporting factors, with $\beta = 0.17$ ($t = 2.86$). Thus, the results support the statement according to which the weak-tie sources are likely to be more a transmission of the information oriented to technical and performance aspects (Duhan et al. 1997), as the supporting factors include service quality and hospitality, which are the results of service performance. Hence, H2.1 was rejected while H2.2 was accepted.

The last relationships of UGC sources are between the tourism-tie sources of UGC and expectations, and the results

confirmed that tourism-tie sources have a direct and significant influence on the expectations about both core and supporting resources, although it is more notable on the core resources. Thus H3.1 and H3.2 are supported with $\beta = 0.24$ ($t = 2.86$) and $\beta = 0.16$ ($t = 2.22$), respectively. This phenomenon explains the fact that since most of the information provided by tourism organizations is usually of a factual or historical nature (Hays, Page, and Buhalis 2013), the possible tourists utilize the UGC from tourism entities as references to generate expectations about the destination, above all in creating expectations about the core resources of the destinations such as its culture, history, activities, and tourism superstructure like accommodation, transportation, and tourist attractions. Moreover, as information can also be exchanged among the users or between the users and the tourism organization (Hays, Page, and Buhalis 2013), these kinds of opinions allow tourists to create the expectations about the supporting factors, which include hospitality, service quality, and general image like security.

Turning our interest to the influence of tourist expectations on tourist perception, there are strong, direct and significant relationships between the expectations about core resources and the perception both core resources and supporting factors. So, H4.1 and H4.2 were accepted with $\beta = 0.53$ ($t = 3.90$) and $\beta = 0.24$ ($t = 2.60$). Nevertheless, there is no direct and no significant relationships between the expectations about supporting factors and the perception of core

resources but there is a significant effect on supporting factors, as $\beta = 0.02$ ($t = 0.36$) and $\beta = 0.72$ ($t = 6.70$), and so H5.1 was rejected but H5.2 was accepted. Consequently, the study agrees with the assimilation theory (Sherif and Hovland 1961) that individuals tend to adjust perceptions to the prior beliefs and their expectations; however, its effects are noticeably dominant when the characteristics of the expectations and the perception are parallel, as it happened in our cases. Moreover, it reveals that the assimilation theory can also carry out with the UGC in social media.

The results of the last relationships in the model, represented in H6.1 and H6.2, were also accepted, since $\beta = 0.51$ ($t = 5.71$) and $\beta = 0.29$ ($t = 4.34$), respectively. This demonstrated that tourist perceptions of core resources or supporting factors affects tourist satisfaction. This confirms the cognitive and affective judgments of tourist influence on her or his satisfaction since more cognitive information is related to the core resources of the destination such as information about its culture and history, special events, accessibility, and so on. On the other hand, the affective judgment is more hidden in supporting factors of the destination such as friendliness or attitude of local people, reliable, safe, and security.

In addition, the reliability of the indicators (R^2) is acceptable as it is greater than .5; for instance, the R^2 values for satisfaction, perception on core resources, and perception on supporting factors are .512, .563, and .663, respectively.

Conclusions and Limitations

As the results demonstrated, it is obvious that UGC in social media is a fundamental factor for tourist satisfaction. It plays a crucial role in the pre-traveling period, which in turn affects the post-traveling period. In our study, following other research grounded in the seminal study by Granovetter (1973) and posterior adaptations to online settings (Francalanci and Hussain 2015; Wang and Chang 2013; Wang et al. 2016), tourists receive information through three types of social media sources: strong ties, weak ties, and tourism ties. The information received not only is important for making decisions, as declared by different authors in the literature, but also creates the expectations of tourists about the destination. This will continue to influence the generation of traveling satisfaction.

Zeng and Gerritsen (2014) called for an expansion of the research dealing with the effect of social media on tourists' behavior, and we believe our research has contributed some new knowledge in this respect. First, it demonstrates that UGC has an influence on tourist expectations and decision-making (pre-traveling), on perception while having a tourism experience (during and post-traveling), and on satisfaction (post-traveling). Second, the study identifies two means of generation of tourist satisfaction: central, which is determined by the assessment of core resources and is the determining factor in generating tourist satisfaction, and peripheral, which

is determined by the assessment of supporting factors and has less relevance in the generation of tourist satisfaction. Third, it fulfills assimilation theory (Sherif and Hovland 1961), since the information and opinions that are formed before traveling not only influence perception during the trip (by adjusting the perceptions to the previous expectations) but also indirectly modulate or regulate satisfaction. This conclusion confirms disconfirmation theory (Oliver 1980), in which expectations have a direct influence on satisfaction. Fourth, the influence of different types of UGC sources is also noteworthy, although the three types of tie sources have similar weights. The study has revealed the role of the new generators of expectations about tourist destinations: strong tie, weak tie, and tourism tie. The role of tourism-tie resources, in particular, influences both core resource expectations and supporting factor expectations.

The strong-tie sources of UGC on social media are the generators that have strong relationships with the users or the possible tourists, such as friends or family. The strong-tie sources influence all the dimensions of expectations, core resources, and supporting factors. Although the influence on the expectations about the supporting factors is a little bit stronger than on the core resources. Since supporting factors are related to what hospitality, service quality, and security of the destination are like, they are likely to be more opinions than facts which are usually employed to explain the characteristics of core resources. Thus, the results agree with Wang et al. (2016), the information received from friends or family is potentially more abstract attitude, opinion or emotional information than informative information.

Weak-tie sources, on the other hand, only influence the expectations about supporting factors. On comparing them with strong ties, both of them are seen to provide more information relating to the hospitality and attitude of local people toward tourists, service quality of tourism establishments, and security in the destination than the information about the attributes of the main attractions. The reasons may be because the information from strong ties and weak ties are the opinions of other tourists who have had experiences at the destination before. Moreover, most of the supporting factors are abstract or intangible objects, and people tend to believe and trust the opinion of people who they can rely on, such as family or friends (strong-tie sources), or at least from other people who have previous experience (weak-tie sources).

Moreover, another aspect diverts from Duhan et al. (1997), who mentioned that in technical and performance terms, weak-tie sources can provide more and better information than strong-tie sources. In contrast, since the supporting factors are related to the service quality and hospitality, our research concluded that strong-tie sources are likely to provide more and better information as they have a stronger effect than weak-tie sources. Last, tourism-tie sources of UGC have a more significant effect on the expectations about core resources than supporting resources. As these sources are from tourism organizations, they usually provide

information about attractions and events, interesting culture and the history of the destination, where and how to go, and so on. Thus, they represent more informative information than opinion.

In addition, regarding the post-traveling period, assimilation theory and identity theory were used for comparison purposes in this study, since tourists will modulate their perceptions by the influence of the expectations that were generated through UGC in social media. It is reasonable that the expectations about the core resources that were created before have a more significant influence on the perception of core resources than supporting factors, at the same time that the expectations about the supporting factors have a greater effect on the supporting factors. Finally, after comparing the expectations with the real perception after traveling, the perception of core resources or supporting factors are the antecedents of tourists' satisfaction. Therefore, a new dimension in relation to the social media in the tourism sector can be identified, since its effects are projected beyond the purchasing decisions to modulate tourist satisfaction. In conclusion, friends, family, and tourism organizations are the most relevant sources generating the tourist's expectations and satisfaction with the destination, although strangers play a significant role in the supporting factors of the destination.

As regards some management recommendations and confirmations for tourist entities, we focus on the comparison among the effects of three types of sources of UGC on the expectations about core resources. Our results show that tourists still trust and choose the tourism authorities to be the main sources in providing them with tourism information regarding core resources, such as facts about culture and history of the destination or attractions at the destination, including information about special events, accessibility, transportation, accommodation, etc. Moreover, the influence of strong-tie sources on the expectations about core resources should not be ignored, since the members of the same group usually have the same perspective, as explained in the literature, and so they might follow the other members' shared information. Hence, the destination managers and all tourism parties at the destination should maintain or improve their strengths and remove their weaknesses with the aim of offering visitors a good impression of the destination. In addition, tourism entities should be active through comments, photos, and videos via social media, as this not only favors the purchase decision but also improves tourist satisfaction. Along with this, the destination must ensure that the tourist will have an experience that is as positive as possible so that satisfaction will be generated.

Future lines of research could consider the negligible social ties and fleeting ties introduced by Dickinson et al. (2017). Another possibility is to introduce in a specific way the role of influencer and their influence on the process of choosing a destination. Regarding the limitations, although the number of samples is small, they were collected by a

face-to-face interview based on a questionnaire at different tourist attractions, which can provide significant advantages and is more reliable than an online questionnaire method that may provide a larger sample but also high deviation. Moreover, there is a low response rate which may be due to the collection period, which was carried out during the winter season, and at that time of year the majority of people traveling to Valencia, Spain, do so for business rather than leisure purposes. In addition, tourists were first screened and so those who did not search for UGC were rejected.

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