USER GENERATED CONTENT IN THE ASSESSMENT OF THE PERCEPTION OF THE TOURISM ENTITY IMAGE

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Abstract

The paper presents the results of analyses concerning the possible use of User Generated Content (UGC) to assess the perception of the image of tourism entities, acting in the travel destinations with high tourist potential. The scientific method applied in the study was the internet survey comprising the quantitative and qualitative content analysis. The quantitative content analysis was focused on the number of a comments and metatags and on assigning them to the suiting factorial parameters. The qualitative content analysis was focused on the essence of the analysed metatags and comments in the context of image shaping factors presented by Baloglu and McCleary (1999). Based on the selected parameters of the model proposed by Baloglu and McCleary, and in order to create a matrix of the distinguishing features of the image used in the promotion, the elements of the website content of agri-tourism farms located in the Białowieża (BNP) and Narew (NNP) national parks were analysed. It was assumed that the chosen content of web sites (metatags) was a direct expression of the manner of perception of the travel destination image by the persons engaged in tourism activities there. For the purpose of the analysis of these entities image perception by tourists, a separate matrix, based on the examination of their opinions, left behind at online tourist offers comparison sites, has been created. The resulting matrices were compiled and the main distinguishing features of the image were indicated from the perspective of both groups. According to the owners of tourist farms from the BNP area the main distinguishing feature of the image of this area are natural values; though the distinguishing features regarding the quality of products and tourism services are slightly less important. Similar conclusions can be drawn based on the data obtained by analysing the opinions of tourists. On the other hand, for the NNP, the dominant role of features related to the quality of products and tourism services was confirmed. It was found that the analysis of the UGC may constitute an important factor allowing for tracing the dynamics of changes in image perception by tourists, which enables for efficient creation of the image of the entity.

The type of the article: Research report.

Keywords: user generated content, agri-tourism farms image, Białowieża National Park, Narew National Park.

JEL Classification: Z19.

1. Introduction

The main objective of the paper was to demonstrate the role of the User Generated Content in the evaluation of the image perception of the travel destinations from the perspective of local tourism entrepreneurs and tourists. The main scientific purpose of the work was the creation of bases for the analysis of dynamics of perceiving the travel destination image based on chosen content elements of the different types of websites.

The use of Internet in the distribution of tourist information transformed the manner of the planning of tourist activity of a modern man (Buhalis & Law, 2008).

Eftekhari *et al.* (2010) states that 70% of travellers use the websites as a main information source. Simultaneously Jacobsen and Munar (2012) indicate that the internet information sources are highly influential in the tourist decision making process.

The User Generated Content (UGC) contains information reflecting the users' own experiences, including the experiences of the tourist activity, which are shared with other users (Blackshaw, 2006). Gretzel (2007) suggests that in searching for information about tourist destinations, the Internet users more often use and exchange in the network the proprietary content related to their tourist activity than the content generated by professional providers of tourist services. Therefore, the UGC can be an important source of information about the tourists' perception of the travel destination image.

The image of the travel destination is a synthesis of beliefs, perceptions, impressions and personal experiences related to the area, resulting from the accumulation of information from various sources (Kotler *et al*., 1993; Lee & Lockshin, 2011; Qu *et al*., 2011). It is, therefore, a mental representation of the individual views about a specific place, being the resultant of many factors and has the greatest impact on tourist loyalty (Zhang *et al*., 2014).

The image of the travel destination can, thus, be seen as a derivative of the cognitive activity of individuals, based on personal experiences, beliefs, and available sources of information. It is assumed that it is one of the main determinants influencing the process of making decisions concerning the selection of a destination (Ritchie and Crouch, 2003; Beerli & Martin, 2004; Nicoletta & Servidio, 2012; Liu, 2014; Parra-López & Oreja-Rodríguez, 2014).

On the other hand, Henderson (2008) believes that the selection and display of the desired distinguishing features of the image can significantly affect the size and social structure of tourism.

Presented below are selected factors shaping the image in the public, also internet, sources of tourist information (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999):

- Factor I The quality of tourism products and services (factorial parameters: cleanliness and hygiene of accommodation and catering; quality of the available infrastructure; personal security; welcoming accommodation, delicious cuisine, good conditions for recreation, interesting and friendly people);
- Factor II Tourist attractions (factorial parameters: cultural attractions, specificity of the national-religious area, sights, local handicraft, mass events, attractive purchases, high quality of entertainment);
- Factor III Wildlife (factorial parameters: clean and unpolluted environment, health-friendly climate, attractive wild fauna and flora, beautiful, natural landscape).

The expression of factors mentioned above is discernible in the content of comments left by users in selected nationwide tourist offers comparison sites (determined as a user generated content - UGC) where the content is created and shared by users for other users. The latter is the one of the main features of WEB 2.0 technology in n contrast with WEB 1.0 where website content are being created by the administrator for users.

Ritchie and Crouch (2003) indicates the need for the presence of unique local attributes, which cause tourists to choose a destination over other destinations. UGC constitutes a portion of a website and embraces the users' opinion about products, services or destinations and enables the understanding of visitor perception of destination image (based on UGC). Therefore, it is an important subject for the people directly associated with the travel destination (e.g. tourism destination marketers, owners of agri-tourism farms). Simultaneously limited research has been focused on the comparison of destination image from the perspective of visitors and local people, based on the WEB 1.0 (e.g. selected content of agri-tourist farm sites) and WEB 2.0 (e.g. opinions of the customers of agri-tourism farms, left in the selected nationwide tourist offers comparison sites) sources of data.

Although Białowieża National Park (BNP) and Narew National Park (NNP) are associated with unique environmental qualities, it was assumed that, both, the visitors and the operators will perceive the image of the area with the dominant role of the discriminants not related to natural attributes, since their influence on image is obvious. Whereas the tourist image of environmentally valuable sites should be created basically on discriminants mainly related to the quality of tourism products and services and tourist attractions.

Based on the presented literature review the specific objective of the study was to evaluate the usefulness of UGC sources of data in the analysis of the image of tourism entities related to travel destinations. Such elaboration was made through the usage of quantitative and qualitative content analysis. As a result the matrices of the image of the selected travel destinations from the perspective of the people directly related to the travel destination (i.e., owners of agri-tourism farms) and tourists were made.

The topicality of the paper is mainly connected with the presentation of the possibility of UGC application for the assessment of the image perception of tourism entities related to travel destinations by tourists.

2. Method

The scientific method applied in the study was the internet survey comprising the quantitative and qualitative content analysis. The quantitative content analysis was focused on the number of a comments and metatags and on assigning them to the suiting factorial parameters. The qualitative content analysis was focused on the essence of the analysed metatags and comments in the context of image shaping factors presented by Baloglu and McCleary.

Websites of 40 agri-tourism farms from the area of the Białowieża (20) and Narew (20) national parks were the research object. It was assumed that their selected content is a direct manifestation of the perception of their image by the people associated with the travel destination. The sites were selected by entering the following keyword combinations: "Białowieża agri-tourism", and „Narew agri-tourism" into the Google search engine. For each of the combinations, the first twenty links relating to the websites of individual agri-tourism farms were taken into account.

The contents of „Keywords" and „Description" metatags, which have been semantically referenced to the various factors affecting the image in the sources of information and indicated as a Factor I, II, III (Baloglu and McCleary, 1999) were analysed. For each website taken into account the analysed metatags were semantically suited for the factorial parameters influencing the entity image mentioned in the Introduction. The metatags were decomposed into a single tags. Single tag could contain the essences referring for one or few factorial parameters. Based on such procedure a frequency of appearing of particular factorial parameters was summed up. The resulting combination of factorial elements was arrayed to form a hierarchical system, i.e., starting with the most frequently and ending with those that were the least frequently encountered. This resulted in obtaining the matrices of the elements defining the image of both of the travel destinations from the perspective of the owners of agri-tourism farms.

Another matrix, reflecting the perception of the image by tourists was prepared at the same way on the basis of the opinions of the customers of agri-tourism farms posted on the selected nationwide tourist offers comparison sites, such as *nocowanie.pl*, *e-turysta.net*, *emeteor.pl*, *spanie.pl*. In this case, a hierarchical ranking of factors was also prepared. 39 comments for the farms located in Białowieża NP and 28 comments for the farms located in Narew NP were found and analysed.

3. Results

Based on the data presented below (Table 1-2) it must be stated that the resulting summaries are different in numbers. Rankings created on the basis of the content analysis of the websites and the tourists' opinions, for the BNP are very similar, and in both cases are composed of seven elements. On the other hand, the statement prepared for the NPN consists of fifteen items for the ranking of factors, created on the basis of the content of the web sites. Ranking created for this area on the basis of the UGC contains 14 elements.

The hierarchical matrices of the factors affecting the image of agri-tourism farms, operating in the vicinity of the Białowieża National Park is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. The hierarchical arrangement of factors building the image of the area
of the Białowieża NP, according to the agri-tourism farms owners and tourists

		The matrix of the image of the Białowieża National Park (based on selected elements of the content of the websites of agri-tourism farms)		The matrix of the image of the area of the Białowieża National Park according to the guests of agri-tourism farms (based on their opinions left in the tourist offers comparison sites)	
Frequency of occurrence ↑	Factor III	Beautiful, natural landscape		Factor III	Beautiful, natural landscape
	Factor I	Quality of the available infrastructure		Factor I	Quality of the available infrastructure
	Factor I	Good conditions for recreation		Factor I	Good conditions for recreation
	Factor III	Health-friendly climate		Factor III	Health-friendly climate
	Factor I	Delicious cuisine		Factor I	Delicious cuisine
	Factor III	Clean, unpolluted environment		Factor III	Attractive wild fauna and flora
	Factor II	Specificity of the national-religious area		Factor III	Clean, unpolluted environment

Source: own study

Both the owners of tourist farms and the tourists (Table 1) recognize the predominant role of the distinguishing features of the area image connected with beautiful, natural landscape. Further, most frequently occurring distinguishing features are the parameters related to quality of the available infrastructure and good conditions for recreation.

Persons engaged in tourist activities hardly ever indicated the specificity of the national-religious area. On the other hand, from the tourists' opinion it is apparent that clean, unpolluted environment is the least frequently appearing feature, to which they pay attention.

The hierarchical matrices of the factors affecting the image of agri-tourism farms, operating in the vicinity of the Narew National Park is presented in Table 2.

Table 2. The hierarchical arrangement of factors building the image of the Narew NP area,
according to agri-tourism farms owners and tourists

		The matrix of the image of the Narew National Park (based on selected elements of the content of the websites of agri-tourism farms)		The matrix of the image of the area of the Narew National Park according to the guests of agri-tourism farms (based on their opinions left in the tourist offers comparison sites)	
Frequency of occurrence ↑	Factor I	Quality of the available infrastructure		Factor I	Interesting and friendly people
	Factor I	Welcoming accommodation		Factor I	Delicious cuisine
	Factor III	Clean, unpolluted environment		Factor I	Good conditions for recreation
	Factor III	Beautiful, natural landscape		Factor I	Quality of the available infrastructure
	Factor III	Attractive wild fauna and flora		Factor II	High quality of entertainment
	Factor II	High quality of entertainment		Factor I	Welcoming accommodation
	Factor II	Mass events		Factor III	Clean, unpolluted environment
	Factor I	Good conditions for recreation		Factor I	Cleanness and hygiene of accommodation and catering
	Factor I	Cleanness and hygiene of accommodation and catering		Factor III	Beautiful, natural landscape
	Factor III	Health-friendly climate		Factor III	Health friendly climate
	Factor II	Cultural attractions		Factor II	Cultural attractions
	Factor II	Monuments		Factor II	monuments
	Factor I	Personal security		Factor III	Attractive wild fauna and flora
	Factor II	Specificity of the national-religious area		Factor III	Specificity of the national-religious area
	Factor I	Interesting, friendly people		-	-

Source: own study

In the case of BNP (Table 1) the content of websites of tourist farms and the UGC refers mainly to Factor I - The quality of tourism products and services, and Factor III - Wildlife. Furthermore, both owners of agri-tourist farms and tourists, in the presentation and perception of the image of destinations, have marginalized the role of Factor II - Tourist attractions.

The situation is slightly different in the case of the NNP area. Basing on the analysis of the contents of web sites it was found that the image of this area is built with almost uniform use of the three main factors - Factors I, II, III (Table 2).

In the case of the UGC analysis it has been demonstrated that tourists perceive the image of the travel destination having in mind mainly quality of tourism products and services (Factor I) and local wildlife (Factor III) and occasionally, in their opinions, they indicate the high quality of entertainment (Factor II).

4. Discussion

Based on the conducted analysis, it was found that parameters related to the quality of tourism products and services and natural values are dominant in creating the image of the selected tourism entities related to protected areas in north-eastern Poland. However, in the case of facilities from the Narew National Park people engaged in touristic activities recognize the important role of tourist attractions (Factor II) in building the image of the destination. It is reflected in the uniform positioning of the distinguishing features associated with cultural attractions with regard to factors related to the quality of tourism products and services and factors relating to the natural attributes. However, the tourist attractions (Factor II), despite their significant positioning in building the image of tourist farms from the area of NPN, for tourists do not constitute a significant distinguishing feature in the perception of the area.

At the same time, the fact that tourism entities from the BNP and NPN areas do not highlight attributes associated with national-religious distinctiveness in building their images is surprising. This is particularly interesting in the case of the BNP area, where significant population centres, which belong to the national and religious minorities, occur. What is interesting, also tourists perceive this area in a very similar way, and in their opinions they do not recognize or they are not aware of the existence of such differences. Explanation of the reasons for this phenomenon requires further detailed research, and recognition of the touristic potential in the national-religious separateness, from the perspective of building the creation strategy of image and destination brand, could be the crucial issue for Destination Management Organizations related with analysed travel destinations in north-eastern Poland.

Zhou (2014) presented results similar to those presented above, and suggested that the image of the destination is seen from the perspective of the expectations of both tourists and the local community, that builds its image on the local, competitive tourism market. Hence, it can be argued that the analysed entities, building their image, simply respond to the basic needs of tourists that usually are associated with the need for variety, contact with nature, etc. Scarles (2009) presented the similar opinion, suggesting that the consumption of tourist values at rural areas is dependent on the available offer and the degree of adjustment to the expectations of tourists.

The selected content of agri-tourist farm sites (WEB 1.0) and UGC as a form of WEB 2.0 (opinions of the customers of agri-tourism farms, left in the selected nationwide tourist offers comparison sites) source of data can be effectively used in the tourist destination image analysis. However, the data obtained on the basis of the comments of tourists (UGC), due to the small number, can be perceived as not fully presenting the actual evaluation of image perception by tourists. Low activity of the social media users in posting comments is not anything special. According to a report by Pew Research Centre entitled *Social networking sites and our lives* (2011), only 20% of people visiting the profiles of other users leave their comments.

Important role in increasing the frequency of commenting could be played by managers of the social media profile, who, by initiating discussions or providing frequent answers to comments, could contribute to an increase in the activity of the commentating people.

Unfortunately, there are reports, for example, from the hotel industry (*Information from Trip advisors' master class, Revinate,* 2011) that only 7% of the surveyed facilities respond to the reviews left in the Internet.

Based on the above, it should be stated that the UGC can constitute an important source of information for effective tracking of the dynamics of changes in the perception of the image of the travel destinations. However, because of the low activity of the commentating people, and the difficulties with obtaining primary data relating to the analysed areas, such work may be hindered.

Nevertheless, the use of the UGC constitutes an important element in building the image of entities conducting tourist activities. The analysis of the content of this type allows for tracking the dynamics of changes in the tourists' image perception, which in turn may allow for the entity's effective image building. Therefore it could be stated state that the scientific purpose of the work was also achieved.

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