

**“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.”**

Angela Tritto
City University of Hong Kong, SOMA

Silvia De Ascaniis, Asta Adukaite
Institute for Communication Technologies
Università della Svizzera italiana – USI, Lugano (Switzerland)

ABSTRACT

INTRODUCTION

Tourists increasingly rely on eWord-of-mouth (eWOM) to make a variety of travel related decisions, thanks to their easiness of access and multiplicity of contributors. Online Travel Reviews (OTR) are the most accessible and prevalent form of eWOM in the field of eTourism (Bronner & De Hoog, 2011; Dwyer, 2007). They represent people’s wish to share their travel experiences online, recommend a tourism product or complain about it. The potential OTR have to influence tourists’ decisions shall be ascribed to their *argumentative nature* (De Ascaniis & Gretzel, 2013): they provide, indeed, “opinionated” information, that is information based upon personal reflection and assessment of the reviewer’s experience (De Ascaniis, Bischof & Cantoni, 2013). The arguments put forward by the reviewer to support his/her opinions may appeal to the readers in different ways: according to common knowledge, to shared as well as to personal values, beliefs, expectations, wishes. An analysis of the arguments provided by tourists in OTR when evaluating a tourism destination allows to gain a precise and deep understanding of their experience and, thus, to capture the overall perception of the destination. An argumentative analysis of a sample of OTR on Jiuzhaigou National Park in China is presented, which is a UNESCO World Heritage Site often regarded as a benchmark for the management of other National Parks in China. Aim of the study was to investigate the arguments given by visitors when commenting either positively or negatively on the park, and to see if and which are the differences between domestic and outbound tourists’ perception. A particular emphasis was put on comments related to the park’s management, with the aim of highlighting if and how tourists’ perceptions of environmental-friendly solutions implemented in the park can be reflected in their reviews. Results have a number of implications for the management of the destination.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Given their increasing importance as information source, a number of studies have investigated OTR under different respects and with a variety of purposes (Biger & Lasser, 2004; Gretzel, Yoo & Purifoy, 2007; Yoo & Gretzel, 2008, 2009; Dickinger, 2011; Jian, Gretzel & Law, 2010). On the industry side, companies are paying considerable attention to the importance of monitoring “what is told online” for keeping a good reputation and improving their business (Marchiori & Cantoni, 2012; Vermeulen & Seegers, 2009). Consumers’ reviews are perceived by readers, in fact, as trustworthy, reliable, enjoyable, more credible and more up-to-date than information provided by marketers, because they are written from a consumer’s perspective and on the base of direct experience (Dickinger, 2011; Arsal, Woosnam, Baldwin & Backman, 2010).

OTR have a high argumentative value: people writing OTR propose a reasoning chain to the reader, to support the recommendation they make. OTR, thus, can be seen as invitations by the reviewer to reason in a certain way, leading the reader to form an opinion about a tourism product/service and, hence, make a travel decision. (De Ascaniis & Gretzel, 2013; De Ascaniis & Greco Morasso, 2011). Argumentation analysis can enhance the understanding of OTR because it provides models for identifying and analyzing opinions (standpoints) and arguments (Rigotti & Greco Morasso, 2009, 2010).

METHOD

A sample of OTR on Jiuzhaigou National Park published on Tripadvisor was collected, going backwards from 30th October 2014 to reach 10% of all the reviews published in any language. The sample comprised 325 OTR, 198 of them were in English while 127 were translated into English from Spanish, French, Brazilian Portuguese, Dutch, Bahasa Indonesian, Chinese and Japanese. The arguments in each review were identified and classified using a tool for text analysis (UAM Corpus Tool), according to the type of argument used for recommending/not recommending a visit and to the reviewer's country of origin.

RESULTS

In total, 967 arguments were identified and classified: 663 (69%) were positive and 304 (31%) were negative; 7 concerned tourism in China, 61 the area outside the park and 839 (93%) the park itself. The table below reports the most used positive respectively negative arguments when recommending a visit to the park, divided per domestic and foreign tourists.

	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

CONCLUSION AND RELEVANCE TO THE INDUSTRY

The value of the study relies mainly on the method used, which allows to identify the parts of the OTR which might influence the most the opinion of readers and, thus, drive their visit decisions. Analyzing the arguments has a number of implication for the management, in that it makes it possible to grasp the reputation an attraction/destination shares among visitors, and to point out aspects in need for improvement.

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AUTHORS' BIOGRAPHY

Angela Tritto received her Bachelor's and Master's degree in Bologna and Edinburgh respectively. Her background is in Chinese studies and business management. Currently, she is in her second year of Doctorate of Philosophy at City University of Hong Kong. Her research interests include heritage and sustainable development; environmental and social innovation; tourism development in South East Asia and CSR. Her works include an article on the use of environmental innovation in Jiuzhaigou, a study of Heritage Impact Assessment and a review of eco-innovation and firm performance.

Silvia De Ascaniis is a Postdoctoral Researcher at the Faculty of Communication Sciences at the Università della Svizzera italiana (USI, Lugano, Switzerland), where she obtained a PhD with a thesis titled "Destination Online Travel Reviews. An argumentative and textual genre perspective." She is the Executive Director of two doctoral schools, both of them founded by the Swiss National Science Foundation (SNSF): Cross-Field (www.cross-field.ch), and Argupolis (www.argupolis.net). Her research interests focus on argumentation dynamics in the online environment and the tourism field, religious and cultural tourism, online communication, ICTs for destination enhancement and promotion.