User Generated Content on Sikkim as an Image Formation Agent:

A Content Analysis of Travel Blogs

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Abstract:

Destination image can be defined as thoughts and feelings towards a destination. There are many definitions of destination image, however most widely accepted definition so far is that, destination image is compilation of ideas, beliefs and impressions based on information processing from a variety of sources over time. There is competition among destinations, based on the image perceived by people about the destination. It is understood that positive image of the destination provides competitive advantage among competitors. By the year 2014, the total number of internet users in the world reached 3 billion i.e. 40% of the world population has internet connection compared to 1% in 1995. Large number of studies suggest the importance and interrelation between technology and tourism. The Internet has changed the way tourists access information, plan their trips, and also the way they share their travel experiences, mostly using user-generated content. Advancement in technology has enabled tourists to experience and share their experience in real time by using texts, photographs, and videos etc. through internet. This leads to formation of destination image even before visiting a particular place. During the period 2005-14, Sikkim has witnessed highest average growth rate of 16.49% and thus occupies top position among the five fastest growing states during 2005-14. Tourism is considered as the backbone of Sikkim's economy and an important source of employment. Sikkim is gradually strengthening its place in the national and international tourism map as a hot spot for scenic beauty, adventure tourism, ecotourism, and spiritual tourism. The increase in domestic and foreign tourists in Sikkim has led to increase in number of travel blogs related to Sikkim. The paper attempts to analyse the blogs generated by both foreign and domestic tourists to identify the attributes discussed by the tourists that contribute in destination image formation about Sikkim.

Keywords: Destination Image, User Generated Content, Sikkim, Travel Blogs, Perceptual Mapping

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