

See discussions, stats, and author profiles for this publication at: <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/319257146>

# User Generated Content on Sikkim as an Image Formation Agent: A Content Analysis of Travel Blogs

Article · December 2017

CITATIONS

4

READS

148

2 authors:



Deep J Gurung

Christ University, Bangalore

9 PUBLICATIONS 12 CITATIONS

SEE PROFILE



Chandan Goswami

Tezpur University

13 PUBLICATIONS 11 CITATIONS

SEE PROFILE

Some of the authors of this publication are also working on these related projects:






Project

Impact of User Generated Content (UGC) on Destination Image [View project](#)

# USER GENERATED CONTENT ON SIKKIM AS AN IMAGE FORMATION AGENT: A Content analysis of travel blogs

Deep Jyoti Gurung\*, Chandan Goswami\*\*

**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  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  to analyze the blogs generated by both foreign and domestic tourists to identify the attributes discussed by the tourists that  destination image formation about Sikkim.

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

## INTRODUCTION


Destination image can be defined as thoughts and feelings towards a destination (Beerli & Martin 2004). There are many definitions of destination image, however most widely accepted definition so far is compilation of ideas, beliefs and impressions based on information processing from a variety of  ces overtime (Gartner, 1994; Gallarza, Saura, & Gracia, 2002; Mackay & Fesenmaier, 2000). There is competition among destinations, based on the image perceived by people about the destination (Baloglu & Mangaloglu, 2001). Many studies are done to investigate the significance of destination

image on the decision to travel (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999; Beerli & Martin, 2004). It is understood that positive image of the destination provides competitive advantage among competitors (Echtner & Ritchie, 1993).

The tourism industry is an information intensive industry (Cox, Burgess, Sellito, & Bultjens 2009). It is one of those sectors which run in a very close relationship with new information and communication technologies (Buhalis 1998). Thus, technology is of high importance to tourism, and their interrelationship has been studied by many researchers (Fodness, 1994; Buhalis & Law, 2008). Back in the year 1989,

\* Research Scholar, Department of Business Administration, Tezpur University, Assam, India.  
Email: deepjg@tezu.ernet.in

\*\* Professor, Department of Business Administration, Tezpur University, Assam, India.

Tim Burners-Lee introduced Web 1.0, the first generation web which is read-only web. The Web 1.0 began as an information place for businesses to produce information, but provided a limited user interactions or content contributions and only allowed to search the information and read it. The concept of web 2.0 as a read-write web was popularized by Tim O'Reilly and Dale Dougherty. It allowed users to submit, review and respond to a content, thus it is also known as social media or, user-generated content (UGC) or consumer generated media (CGM), where they all mean the same (Cox *et al.*, 2009). User-generated content plays very important role especially in the field of tourism (Akehurst 2009).

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

### Destination Image

The complex nature of destination image is attributed for so many variations in the definition of destination image (Gartner 1994). In 1971, Hunt described destination image as the impressions that a person or persons hold about a destination in which they do not reside. Crompton (1979) and Dadgostar&Isostalo (1992) describes destination image as the sum of all views, thoughts and impressions that people associate with a destination. From tourist point of view Valls (as in Lopes 2011) describes destination image as a set of consumer perceptions. According to it Bigné, Sánchez and Sánchez (2001) explains destination image as the subjective interpretation of reality by the tourist. According to Martín and Rodriguez (2008), destination image develops based on tourist perception of all the destinations they have visited or have known about. According to Choi, Lehto, & Morrison(2007) destination image is generally referred to as “a compilation of beliefs and impressions based on information processing from a variety of sources over time,” leading to mental construct representing attributes and benefits sought of a destination (Crompton, 1979; Gallarza, Saura & Gracia 2002; MacKay & Fesenmaier, 2000). The destination image can influence the destination selection process, tourist's pre-visit perception about the destination, evaluation of the destination during the trip, and intentions to revisit (Baloglu & McCleary 1999). Moreover, visitors will be more likely to recommend a destination if their destination image is favorable (Chen & Tsai, 2007). From 25 empirical studies on tourist destination image formation by Gallarza, Saura & Gracia (2014) 20 attributes have been derived which contribute to the formation of destination image. The attributes which are very specific to a particular location were not included. Thus, only those attributes were selected that can be relevant for most of the destinations. These attributes are various activities, landscape, surroundings, nature, cultural attractions, nightlife and entertainment, sport facilities, transportation, accommodation, gastronomy, price

(value and cost included), climate, relaxation, information available, accessibility, safety, shopping facilities, social interaction, resident's receptiveness, originality, service quality. The importance of cognitive and affective image to the measure destination image has been realized by various researchers (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999; Beerli & Martin, 2004). The future action that a tourist will take related to a destination forms the conative image of the destination (Gartner 1994). According to Gartner (1994) the three components are “hierarchically interrelated components: cognitive, affective and conative”. The cognitive-affective-conative model of destination image has been confirmed through study by Agapito, Patricia, & Júlio (2013) employing quantitative empirical. Many studies on destination image have also used the cognitive-affective-conative model to measure destination image (Kladou & Mavragini, 2015).

### User-generated content

User generated content had existed approximately since 1981 but was widely adopted only in 2003 (Bolton, Parasuraman, Hoefnagels, Migchels, Kabadayi, & Gruber 2013). Gradually, user-generated content has become one of the important sources of information for consumer making a purchasing decision as there are advancements in technology. It is the means by which consumers use web applications that allow them to create online content (Lange-Faria & Elliot 2012). According to Christodoulides, Jevons, & Bonhomme (2012) user-generated contents are “consumers creating content that is made available through publicly accessible transmission media such as the internet; reflects some degree of creative effort; and is created for free outside professional routines and practices”.

Blackshaw & Nazzaro (2006) describes user generated content (consumer generated content) as “a mixture of fact and opinion, impression and sentiments, founded and unfounded tidbits, experiences, and even rumor”.

### Characteristics, Types and Platform of User Generated Content

In 2006, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) has identified criteria for contents to be termed as user-generated content (termed as user-created content):

- (a) The user-generated content (henceforth referred as UGC) needs to be published online, either in public domain or personal webpages like social networking sites.
- (b) Users must have added some creativity in the contents posted which includes expression of his/her thoughts

with the post, in order to be considered as user-generated content.

(c) The user-generated content must be produced 'outside of professional routines and practices'. User generated content can be of various formats such as:

**Table 1: Formats of User-generated Content**

| Format | Description  | Example  |
|--------|--|--|
| Text   | Writings of their own or addition or modification of others writing                  | Fanfiction.net, Quizilla.com, Writely  |
| Photo  | Images/photos taken/created by own   | Photos posted on sites such as Ofoto and Flickr; Photo blogging; Remixed images  |
| Audio  | Own audio recorded or modified and distributed through Internet in various platforms | Audio mash-ups, remixes, home-recorded music on bands websites or MySpace pages, Podcasting.   |
| Videos | Own video recorded or edited and distributed through Internet in various platforms   | Movie trailer remixes; Lip synching videos; Video blogs and video casting; Posting home videos; Hosting sites include YouTube and Google Video; Current TV |

(Source: Vincent & Vickery, 2006)

Further OECD has also introduced various UGC platforms based on their usage. Such as:

**Table 2: Different Platforms Used for user Generated Content**

| Platform  | Description  | Examples   |
|---|--|--|
| Blogs   | Websites that are regularly updated with contents from user(s) outside traditional style               | BoingBoing, Engadget, LiveJournal, MSN, Spaces, CyWorld, Skyblog |
| Wikis and Other Text- Based Collaboration Formats | Website run collectively by users and users can edit and add content                                   | PBWiki, JotSpot, SocialText, wikitravel, Writely                 |
| Sites allowing feedback on written works          | Websites allowing users to read, review and communicate with each other                                | FanFiction.Net   |
| Group-based aggregation                           | Collecting links of online content and rating, tagging, and otherwise aggregating them collaboratively | Digg, del.icio.us  |
| Podcasting  | A podcast is a multimedia file distributed over the Internet for playback in various devices           | iTunes, FeedBruner, iPodderX, WinAmp, @Podder                    |
| Social Network Sites                              | Websites where individuals can create their own profile  | MySpace, Facebook, Friendster, Bebo, Cyworld                     |
| Content or File sharing sites                     | Legitimate sites that help share content between users and artists                                     | Digital Media Project  |

(Source: Vincent & Vickery, 2006)

## Destination Image and User Generated Content

The tourism industry is an information intensive industry (Cox *et al.* 2009). It is one of those sectors which run in a very close relationship with new information and communication technologies (Buhalis 1998). Thus technology is of high importance to tourism, and their interrelationship has been studied by many researchers (Fodness & Murray, 1997; Buhalis & Law, 2008). Internet is used to make decisions regarding a destination by most of the travelers (Jeng & Fesenmaier, 2002; Litvin, Goldsmith, & Pan, 2008). User Generated Content has enabled tourists to share their experiences in real time using Internet. (Litvin, Goldsmith, & Pan, 2008).

According to Litvin & Hoffman (2012), the user-generated content and websites have served as a great wealth of information for the tourism industry by allowing sharing of experiences on destination, facilities etc. It has grown to be one of the most effective means for tourists for seeking information and share travelling experiences (Cox *et al.*, 2009). It also influences social benefits and membership behaviors in online travel communities (Casaló, Flavián, & Guinaliú 2010), and increases awareness regarding people, destination, event and tourism (Salazar 2007) and also contributes in image creation (Tussyadiah & Fesenmaier 2009). According to the study by Fotis, Buhalis, & Rossides (2011), 45% of prospective travellers searched their destination through user generated content, around 42% sought suggestions about various activities (mainly excursion

and leisure activities), 50% of travellers used social media to stay connected with friends and 30% to find holiday-related information. Further study of 5719 documents by Dickinger and Koltringer (2011) reveals that UGC is the richest and most diverse source of online travel information. User-generated reviews on destination and its attributes became important sources of information for travelers, and have gained popularity along with travel blogs (Pan, MacLaurin, & Crofts 2007).

## Sikkim Tourism

The Himalayan state of Sikkim is located between 27°4'46" to 28°7'48"N and 88°58" to 88°55'25"E. The altitude ranges from 270m to 8585 m, sharing international boundaries with Nepal, Tibet and Bhutan in north eastern India covering an area of 7096 sq km. According to census report 2011, the total population of the state is 610,577 making it the least populous state in India and the second-smallest state after Goa in total area. Sikkim encompasses the world's third highest peak Khanchendzonga (8585 m). Some other best known peaks are Pauhunri (7125m), Pandim (6691m), Talung (6147m), Tent Peak (7365m), Jongsang (7459m), Sinioulchu (6887m), Rathong (6679m), and Koktang (6147m). The state is over one hundred streams and rivers, twenty eight mountain peaks, twenty one glaciers, five hot springs, and two hundred twenty seven high altitude lakes (including the Tsongmo Lake and Khecheopalri Lakes). It is home for three hundred species of ferns and its allies, four thousand species of flowering plants, eight species of tree ferns, thirty to forty species of Premolars, twenty species of bamboos and eleven species of Oaks, The state is also very rich in fauna; it is home to one hundred forty four species of mammals, five hundred to six hundred species of birds, over four hundred species of butterflies and moths. Apart from the above attractions Sikkim tourism promotes pilgrimage tourism, heritage tourism, adventure tourism and village tourism. The inflow of tourists in the state since 2005 is given below:

**Table 3: Tourist Inflow in Sikkim for the Year 2005-2014**

| Year | DOMESTIC TOURIST | FOREIGN TOURIST |
|------|------------------|-----------------|
| 2005 | 347650           | 16518           |
| 2006 | 421943           | 18049           |
| 2007 | 465204           | 17837           |
| 2008 | 512373           | 19154           |
| 2009 | 615628           | 17730           |
| 2010 | 700011           | 20757           |

| Year | DOMESTIC TOURIST | FOREIGN TOURIST |
|------|------------------|-----------------|
| 2011 | 552453           | 23945           |
| 2012 | 558538           | 26489           |
| 2013 | 576749           | 31698           |
| 2014 | 562418           | 49175           |
| 2015 | 705023           | 38479           |
| 2016 | 740763           | 66012           |

(Source: "Statistics of Tourist Arrival in the State of Sikkim", 2017)

## RESEARCH GAP

Researchers have tried to identify relationship between online sources and destination image representation (Choi *et al.*, 2007; Tang, Choi, Morrison, Lehto, 2009). According to Cox *et al.* (2009) there are still many questions to be answered about the role of UGC. Munar (2012) suggest that user generated content has not been thoroughly researched especially in the field of destination management. According to Zeng & Gerritsen (2014), 'social media sources must be strategically included for research data collection and analysis'. Further, studies on destination image of Sikkim could not be found.

Thus the following gaps have been identified:

- There is a need to identify the attributes that play important role in formation of destination image through user-generated content.
- Study on destination image of Sikkim could not be found.
- There is a need to understand destination as discussed in User Generated platforms.

## OBJECTIVES

- To identify relative importance of attributes on destination as projected by user generated content.
- To understand the image of Sikkim as described in tourist blogs.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Content analysis is objective, systematic and can provide quantitative description of the content unlike other qualitative techniques (Kassarjian 1977). Content analysis allows observation of communication among people (Kerlinger as in Kassarjian, 1977). Thus, identification of the elements used to describe attributes of destination image in various UGC platforms are analyzed through Content Analysis. Eleven blogs were selected from popular travel blog portal ([www.travelblogs.org](http://www.travelblogs.org)). The travelogues has total 110 (as on

18/10/2015 blogs among which 6 are written in language other than English such as French, German etc. therefore from the rest 11 blogs were selected on judgmental basis. Among which 5 from foreign tourists and 6 are from domestic tourists.

**Table 4: List of Travel Blogs Selected for Study**

| Sl. No. | Webpage   | Domestic/Foreign |
|---------|---|------------------|
| 1       | <a href="https://www.travelblog.org/Asia/India/Sikkim/Lachung/blog-889320.html">https://www.travelblog.org/Asia/India/Sikkim/Lachung/blog-889320.html</a>   | Domestic         |
| 2       | <a href="https://www.travelblog.org/Asia/India/Sikkim/Gangtok/blog-869534.html">https://www.travelblog.org/Asia/India/Sikkim/Gangtok/blog-869534.html</a>   | Domestic         |
| 3       | <a href="https://www.travelblog.org/Asia/India/Sikkim/Gangtok/blog-864363.html">https://www.travelblog.org/Asia/India/Sikkim/Gangtok/blog-864363.html</a>   | Domestic         |
| 4       | <a href="https://www.travelblog.org/Asia/India/Sikkim/blog-834215.html">https://www.travelblog.org/Asia/India/Sikkim/blog-834215.html</a>                   | Foreign          |
| 5       | <a href="https://www.travelblog.org/Asia/India/Sikkim/blog-826488.html">https://www.travelblog.org/Asia/India/Sikkim/blog-826488.html</a>                   | Domestic         |
| 6       | <a href="https://www.travelblog.org/Asia/India/Sikkim/Gangtok/blog-792948.html">https://www.travelblog.org/Asia/India/Sikkim/Gangtok/blog-792948.html</a>   | Domestic         |
| 7       | <a href="https://www.travelblog.org/Asia/India/Sikkim/Gangtok/blog-792208.html">https://www.travelblog.org/Asia/India/Sikkim/Gangtok/blog-792208.html</a>   | Foreign          |
| 8       | <a href="https://www.travelblog.org/Asia/India/Sikkim/blog-787548.html">https://www.travelblog.org/Asia/India/Sikkim/blog-787548.html</a>                   | Foreign          |
| 9       | <a href="https://www.travelblog.org/Asia/India/Sikkim/blog-786788.html">https://www.travelblog.org/Asia/India/Sikkim/blog-786788.html</a>                   | Foreign          |
| 10      | <a href="https://www.travelblog.org/Asia/India/Sikkim/blog-756926.html">https://www.travelblog.org/Asia/India/Sikkim/blog-756926.html</a>                   | Foreign          |
| 11      | <a href="https://www.travelblog.org/Asia/India/Sikkim/Ravangla/blog-790150.html">https://www.travelblog.org/Asia/India/Sikkim/Ravangla/blog-790150.html</a> | Domestic         |

(Source: Sample blogs selected for study)

Three coders familiar to the study have done the coding of the blogs manually. The coding is primarily based on the 20 attributes identified by Gallarza, Saura and Gracia (2002), further literature reviews of destination attributes have been added, replaced or modified the terms as used in Gallarza, Saura and Gracia's study. The attributes are simplified for better understanding of the coders such as gastronomy is coded as 'Local Food (Cuisine)', Nature & Landscape has been merged as 'Landscape & Natural Beauty' and 'Flora & Fauna' is separated from 'Nature'. In Sikkim it is also observed that most of the people use sport facilities such as rafting, trekking and paragliding for experience and fun rather than for sports, therefore the 'Sport Facility' is merged

with 'Sport and recreational Activities'. Similarly 'Tourist Attraction Point' encompasses all the tourist attraction points including cultural and traditional values. 'Cultural/historic/ethnic attractions, encompasses all the cultural aspects Architecture, tradition, customs, local songs and dances. Also the term 'accessibility' has been simplified to 'road'. The coders have also attempted to analyze the bloggers words for positive, negative and neutral evaluations about the destination as also done by Kladou and Mavragani in their study. With the Krippendorff's alpha value of 0.784 the inter-rater reliability among the coders was found to be satisfactory (Krippendorff 2003).


## DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDING

**Table 5: Number of Statements about Destination Attributes**

| S.No. | Attributes                            | Foreigner tourist's statement | Domestic tourist's statement | Total |
|-------|---------------------------------------|-------------------------------|------------------------------|-------|
| 1     | Positive: Overall image               | 2                             | 5                            | 7     |
| 2     | Neutral: Overall image                | 0                             | 1                            | 1     |
| 3     | Negative: Overall image               | 0                             | 0                            | 0     |
| 4     | Positive: Landscape & Natural beauty  | 7                             | 6                            | 13    |
| 5     | Neutral: Landscape & Natural beauty   | 0                             | 1                            | 1     |
| 6     | Negative: Landscape & Natural beauty  | 0                             | 0                            | 0     |
| 7     | Positive: Nightlife and Entertainment | 0                             | 0                            | 0     |
| 8     | Neutral: Nightlife and Entertainment  | 0                             | 0                            | 0     |
| 9     | Negative: Nightlife and Entertainment | 2                             | 2                            | 4     |

| S.No. | Attributes   | Foreigner tourist's statement | Domestic tourist's statement | Total |
|-------|--|-------------------------------|------------------------------|-------|
| 10    | Positive: Overall Accommodation experience   | 2                             | 2                            | 4     |
| 11    | Neutral: Overall Accommodation experience  | 2                             | 1                            | 3     |
| 12    | Negative: Overall Accommodation experience   | 2                             | 2                            | 4     |
| 13    | Positive: Food (Cuisine)   | 1                             | 1                            | 2     |
| 14    | Neutral: Food (Cuisine)  | 1                             | 2                            | 3     |
| 15    | Negative: Food (Cuisine)   | 0                             | 0                            | 0     |
| 16    | Positive: Safety & Security  | 0                             | 0                            | 0     |
| 17    | Neutral: Safety & Security   | 1                             | 1                            | 2     |
| 18    | Negative: Safety & Security  | 0                             | 1                            | 1     |
| 19    | Positive: Local's friendliness & hospitality   | 2                             | 2                            | 4     |
| 20    | Neutral: Local's friendliness & hospitality  | 0                             | 0                            | 0     |
| 21    | Negative: Local's friendliness & hospitality   | 0                             | 0                            | 0     |
| 22    | Positive: Cultural/historic/ethnic attractions (Architecture, tradition, customs, traditional dress, local songs and dances) | 5                             | 4                            | 9     |
| 23    | Neutral: Cultural/historic/ethnic attractions (Architecture, tradition, customs, traditional dress, local songs and dances)  | 1                             | 1                            | 2     |
| 24    | Negative: Cultural/historic/ethnic attractions (Architecture, tradition, customs, traditional dress, local songs and dances) | 1                             | 0                            | 1     |
| 25    | Positive: Tourist Attraction Points  | 5                             | 6                            | 11    |
| 26    | Neutral: Tourist Attraction Points   | 1                             | 3                            | 4     |
| 27    | Negative: Tourist Attraction Points  | 1                             | 0                            | 1     |
| 28    | Positive: Flora and Fauna  | 3                             | 4                            | 7     |
| 29    | Neutral: Flora and Fauna   | 0                             | 2                            | 2     |
| 30    | Negative: Flora and Fauna  | 1                             | 0                            | 1     |
| 31    | Positive: Value for Money (Price)  | 1                             | 1                            | 2     |
| 32    | Neutral: Value for Money (Price)   | 0                             | 0                            | 0     |
| 33    | Negative: Value for Money (Price)  | 2                             | 0                            | 2     |
| 34    | Positive: Climatic condition   | 0                             | 0                            | 0     |
| 35    | Neutral: Climatic condition  | 1                             | 1                            | 2     |
| 36    | Negative: Climatic condition   | 3                             | 5                            | 8     |
| 37    | Positive: Restaurant's and café  | 9                             | 3                            | 12    |
| 38    | Neutral: Restaurant's and café   | 3                             | 2                            | 0     |
| 39    | Negative: Restaurant's and café  | 0                             | 0                            | 0     |
| 40    | Positive: Sports and Recreational Activities   | 1                             | 3                            | 4     |
| 41    | Neutral: Sports and Recreational Activities  | 1                             | 4                            | 5     |
| 42    | Negative: Sports and Recreational Activities   | 1                             | 1                            | 2     |
| 43    | Positive: Shopping facilities  | 2                             | 1                            | 3     |
| 44    | Neutral: Shopping facilities   | 0                             | 4                            | 4     |
| 45    | Negative: Shopping facilities  | 0                             | 1                            | 1     |
| 49    | Positive: Road condition   | 2                             | 2                            | 4     |
| 50    | Neutral: Road condition  | 3                             | 1                            | 4     |
| 51    | Negative: Road condition   | 8                             | 2                            | 10    |
| 52    | Positive: Surrounding (Cleanliness/Hygiene)  | 7                             | 13                           | 20    |
| 53    | Neutral: Surrounding (Cleanliness/Hygiene)   | 1                             | 0                            | 1     |

| S.No. | Attributes   | Foreigner tourist's statement | Domestic tourist's statement | Total |
|-------|--|-------------------------------|------------------------------|-------|
| 54    | Negative: Surrounding (Cleanliness/Hygiene)                              | 1                             | 0                            | 1     |
| 55    | Positive: Transportation services & facilities                           | 1                             | 1                            | 2     |
| 56    | Neutral: Transportation service & facilities                             | 4                             | 2                            | 6     |
| 57    | Negative: Transportation service & facilities                            | 1                             | 1                            | 2     |
| 58    | Positive: About People (Lifestyle)                                       | 2                             | 5                            | 7     |
| 59    | Neutral: About People (Lifestyle)  | 2                             | 1                            | 3     |
| 60    | Negative: About People (Lifestyle)                                       | 2                             | 1                            | 3     |
| 61    | <b>Positive: Traffic</b> and parking                                     | 0                             | 0                            | 0     |
| 62    | Neutral: Traffic and parking   | 0                             | 0                            | 0     |
| 63    | Negative: Traffic and parking  | 2                             | 1                            | 3     |
| 64    | Positive: Local Handicrafts and Handlooms                                | 1                             | 1                            | 2     |
| 65    | Neutral: Local Handicrafts and Handlooms                                 | 1                             | 1                            | 2     |
| 66    | Negative: Local Handicrafts and Handlooms                                | 0                             | 0                            | 0     |
| 67    | Positive: Other attractions (e.g Snow, flower shows, events, shows etc.) | 2                             | 3                            | 5     |
| 68    | Neutral: Other attractions   | 2                             | 0                            | 2     |
| 69    | Negative: Other attractions  | 0                             | 0                            | 0     |
| 70    | Positive: Entry formalities & restrictions in certain part of Sikkim     | 3                             | 0                            | 3     |
| 71    | Neutral: Entry formalities & restrictions in certain part of Sikkim      | 2                             | 1                            | 3     |
| 72    | Negative: Entry formalities & restrictions in certain part of Sikkim     | 1                             | 0                            | 1     |
| 73    | Positive: Tour Guides/Operators  | 2                             | 6                            | 8     |
| 74    | Neutral: Tour Guides/Operators   | 0                             | 2                            | 2     |
| 75    | Negative: Tour Guides/Operators  | 2                             | 0                            | 2     |

(Source: Sample survey )

Analysis of data shows that Sikkim provides a mix of the cognitive element of destination image 'Surrounding (Cleanliness/ Hygiene) (n=20), where Sikkim is described to be very neat & clean, specially mentioning Gangtok city and the nearby attractions. Similarly, a large group of people (n=13) has repeatedly mentioned the 'Landscape and Natural Beauty' of Sikkim as remarkable, stunning, beautiful etc, suggesting that landscape and natural beauty appeals to both foreign and domestic tourists. Majority of tourists (n=11) have written positive statements about various tourist attraction points of Sikkim. Other destination attributes found positive about Sikkim are Local's friendliness & hospitality, Cultural/historic/ethnic attractions, and Flora and Fauna.

On the contrary most of the tourists (n=10) has written negative statements about the roads to various destinations in Sikkim. Other destination attributes mentioned negative are Traffic and parking, Climatic condition, and Nightlife and Entertainment.

The study of blogs has also reflected the role of tour guides/operators/agencies in promoting a destination as many of the blogs (n=12) has specially mentioned about their tour guide/agency/operator. Drivers are specially found mentioned about their skills and confidence in driving through the rough roads of Sikkim. The need for wi-fi connectivity in 'restaurant & café' is also reflected in the findings. Most visited place in Sikkim is 'Rumtek Monastery'.

After analyzing the number of people commenting positively, neutrally, and negatively on the different attributes, an attempt has been made to find the positivity and negativity of the tourists on the attributes. Positivity and negativity of the attributes have been calculated by dividing the positive/negative responses recorded by one attribute by the total number of occurrence of that particular attribute during the content analysis. The following table (Table 6) is the outcome of the analysis.

**Table 6: Perceptions Regarding Different Attributes of Sikkim**

| ATTRIBUTES   | Positive | Neutral | Negative | Total | Positivity | Negativity |
|--|----------|---------|----------|-------|------------|------------|
| Overall image  | 7        | 1       | 0        | 8     | 0.87       | 0          |
| Landscape & Natural beauty   | 13       | 1       | 0        | 14    | 0.92       | 0          |
| Nightlife and Entertainment  | 0        | 0       | 4        | 4     | 0          | 1          |
| Overall Accommodation experience   | 4        | 3       | 4        | 11    | 0.36       | 0.36       |
| Food (Cuisine)   | 2        | 3       | 0        | 5     | 0.4        | 0          |
| Safety & Security  | 0        | 2       | 1        | 3     | 0          | 0.33       |
| Local's friendliness & hospitality   | 4        | 0       | 0        | 4     | 1          | 0          |
| Cultural/historic/ethnic attractions (Architecture, tradition, customs, traditional dress, local songs and dances) | 9        | 2       | 1        | 12    | 0.75       | 0.08       |
| Tourist Attraction Points  | 11       | 4       | 1        | 16    | 0.68       | 0.06       |
| Flora and Fauna  | 7        | 2       | 1        | 10    | 0.7        | 0.1        |
| Value for Money (Price)  | 2        | 0       | 2        | 4     | 0.5        | 0.5        |
| Climatic condition   | 0        | 2       | 8        | 10    | 0          | 0.8        |
| Restaurant's and café  | 12       | 0       | 0        | 12    | 1          | 0          |
| Sports and Recreational Activities   | 4        | 5       | 2        | 11    | 0.36       | 0.18       |
| Shopping facilities  | 3        | 4       | 1        | 8     | 0.37       | 0.12       |
| Road condition   | 4        | 4       | 10       | 18    | 0.22       | 0.55       |
| Surrounding (Cleanliness/Hygiene)  | 20       | 1       | 1        | 22    | 0.90       | 0.04       |
| Transportation service & facilities  | 2        | 6       | 2        | 10    | 0.2        | 0.2        |
| About People (Lifestyle)   | 7        | 3       | 3        | 13    | 0.53       | 0.23       |
| Traffic and parking  | 0        | 0       | 3        | 3     | 0          | 1          |
| Local Handicrafts and Handlooms  | 2        | 2       | 0        | 4     | 0.5        | 0          |
| Other attractions  | 5        | 2       | 0        | 7     | 0.71       | 0          |
| Entry formalities & restrictions in certain part of Sikkim   | 3        | 3       | 1        | 7     | 0.42       | 0.14       |
| Tour Guides/Operators  | 8        | 2       | 2        | 12    | 0.6        | 0.16       |

(Source: Sample survey)

It is clear from the above table that the attributes where the image of Sikkim is positive are:

- Local's friendliness and hospitality
- Restaurant and café
- Surrounding (Cleanliness and hygiene)
- Landscape and Natural beauty
- Other attractions
- Cultural/historic/ethnic attractions (architecture)
- Tour Guides and Operators, and
- Entry formalities.

The overall image of Sikkim as a tourist destination is quite impressive (0.875).

The attributes where Sikkim has scored negative image are:

- Nightlife and entertainment
- Road condition

Based on this information, a perceptual map has been drawn, which is presented below (Figure 1)

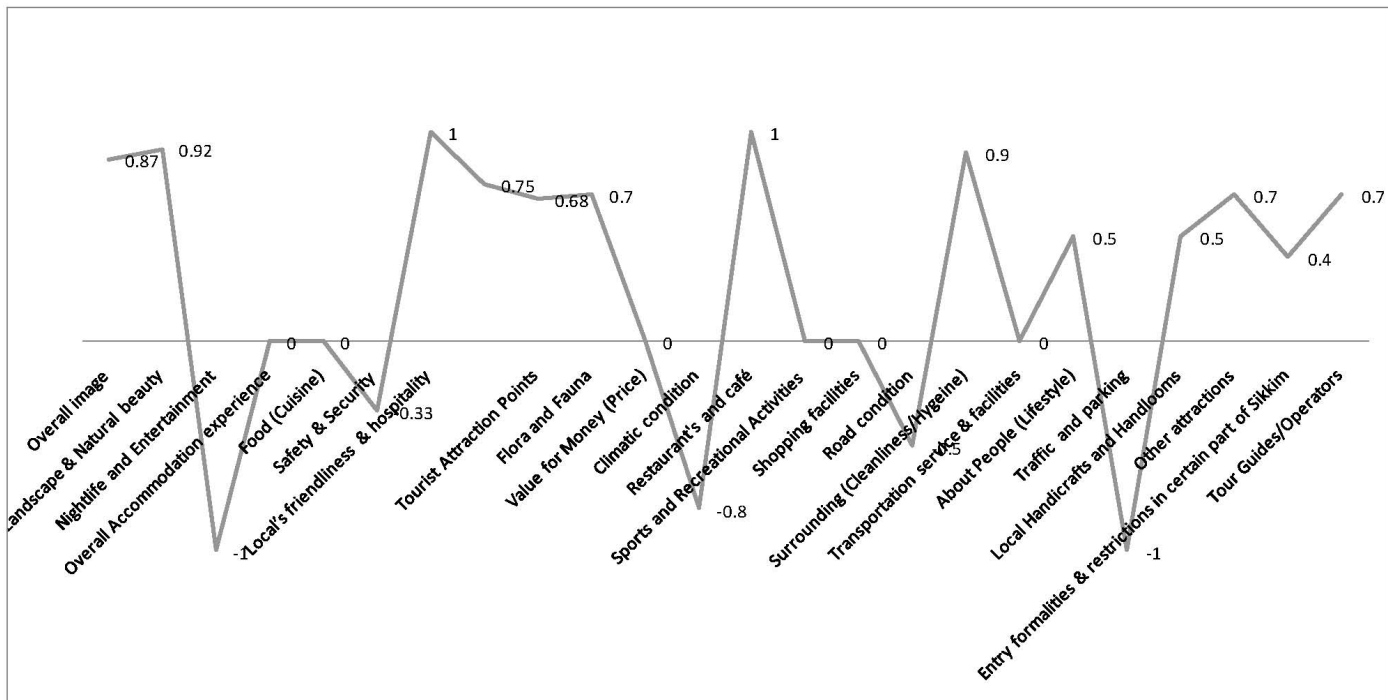


Fig. 1: Destination Image of Sikkim on the basis of Content Analysis

(Source: Sample survey)

The contributors have also expressed ‘Affective component’ of destination image for Sikkim with words like ‘relaxing, pleasant, exciting, peaceful, tranquility’ etc. A total of 14 statements were identified, among which all of them expresses positivity.

Conative component was also expressed with 11 positive statements such as ‘I’ll recommend, must-go, I’ll help others to know about Sikkim etc.’

Blogs have mentioned Sikkim information Centre, travel programs on TV, research on the internet and reading many blogs, pictures, travel reviews, recommendations from others as their source of information mostly before their tour. In some blogs, it is also observed that during the tour, tourists often gather information from tourist guides/agencies/operators, locals and also from hotels.

## RECOMMENDATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

The finding highlights on the importance of cleanliness and hygiene for a destination. However, the statements praising cleanliness of Sikkim are mostly related to Gangtok and nearby attractions. It can be thought that in other tourist attractions the ‘cleanliness and hygiene’ attribute fails to appeal to the tourists. ‘Landscape and Natural beauty’ is a key strength of Sikkim, thus Sikkim should preserve it. Creation of ‘man-made attractions’ in place of ‘landscape and natural beauty’ is not suggestible.

Sikkim should attempt to improve road conditions to various tourist points, as tourists have often mentioned **it rough**, bad, muddy, and also ‘it cannot even be called road’. They have expressed their discomfort and physical pain in travelling through these roads. Moreover, the traffic congestion is mentioned and haphazard parking at certain places are being taken negatively by tourists. Thus, attempts for proper traffic flow and strict parking rules can be suggested. It is also been observed that promotion of local Handicrafts and Handlooms is lacking behind. Shopping facilities are mostly concentrated in Gangtok and there is lack of shopping facilities in other places as all the statements related to shopping is only about places in Gangtok. There are still opportunities to promote Sikkim through various sources. As the source of information mentioned in blogs are very few; however there are plenty of sources through which Sikkim can be promoted. For example- print & video advertisements, tourist promotion materials distribution at various places in India and abroad, use of social networks such as facebook, instagram etc. However one official twitter handle of Sikkim tourism was found however it lacks followers.

## LIMITATIONS AND SCOPE OF THE STUDY

Though the study reveals some interesting facts about destination attributes of Sikkim that appeals to **tourist**. It is not free from limitations. The study is based on few blogs

which is not sufficient for generalization. Use of more blogs will further lead to the truth. Though all attempts are made to avoid human biasness however it cannot be guaranteed. The limitation of content analysis this method is also influencing the study. Thus, use of some other efficient research methodology can reveal more deep information hidden in the travel blogs regarding a destination.

## REFERENCES

- Agapito, D. Patricia, O. D. V., & Júlio, D. C. M. (2013). The cognitive-ffective-  
Conative model of destination image: A confirmatory analysis. *Journal of Travel & Tourism Marketing*, 30(5), 471-81. Retrieved from <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/10548408.2013.803393>
- Akehurst, G. (2009). User generated content: the use of blogs for tourism organizations and tourism consumers. *Service Business*, 3(1), 51-61.
- Buhalis, D. (1998). Strategic use of information technologies in the tourism industry. *Tourism Management*, 19(5), 409-421.
- Buhalis, D., & Law, R. (2008) Progress in information technology and tourism management: 20 years on and 10 years after the Internet: The state of eTourism research. *Tourism Management*, 29(4), 609-623.
- Baloglu, S., & Mangalolu, M. (2001) Tourism destination images of Turkey, Egypt, Greece, and Italy perceived by US-based tour operators and travel agents. *Tourism Management*, 22(1):1- 19.
- Baloglu, S., & McCleary, K. (1999) A model of destination image formation. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 26(4), 868-897. Retrieved from [http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/s0160-7383\(99\)00030-4](http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/s0160-7383(99)00030-4)
- Beerli, A., & Martín, J. (2004). Factors influencing destination in. *Annals Of Tourism Research*, 31(3), 657-681. Retrieved from <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.annals.2004.01.010>
- Bigné, J., Sánchez, M. & Sánchez, J. (2001). Tourism image, evaluation variables and after purchasebehaviour inter-relationship. *Tourism Management*, 22(6), 607-616. [http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/s0261-5177\(01\)00035-8](http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/s0261-5177(01)00035-8)
- Blackshaw, P., & Nazzaro, M. (2006). Consumer-generated Media (CGM) 101: Word-of-mouth in the Age of the Web-fortified Consumer, (2nd ed.). p-6-7, Nielsen BuzzMetrics, New York.
- Bolton, R., Parasuraman, A., Hoefnagels, A., Migchels, N., Kabadayi, S., & Gruber, T. (2013). Understanding Generation Y and their use of social media: A review and research agenda. *Journal of Service Management*, 24(3), 245-267. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/09564231311326987>
- Buhalis, D. (1998). Strategic use of information technologies in the tourism industry. *Tourism Management*, 19(5), 409-421. Retrieved from [http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/s0261-5177\(98\)00038-7](http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/s0261-5177(98)00038-7)
- Casaló, L., Flavián, C., & Guinalú, M. (2010). Determinants of the intention to participate in firm-hosted online travel communities and effects on consumer behavioral intentions. *Tourism Management*, 31(6), 898-911. Retrieved from <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2010.04.007>
- Chen, C., & Tsai, D. (2007). How destination image and evaluative factors affect behavioral intentions?. *Tourism Management*, 28(4), 1115-1122. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2006.07.007>
- Cox, C., Burgess, S., Sellito, C., & Bultjens, J. (2009). The role of user-generated content in tourists' travel planning behavior. *Journal of Hospitality Marketing & Management*, 18(8), 743-764.
- Christodoulides, G., Jevons, C., & Bonhomme, J. (2012). Memo to Marketers: Quantitative Evidence for Change. *Journal of Advertising Research*, 52(1), 53-64. <http://dx.doi.org/10.2501/jar-52-1-053-064>
- Crompton, J. (1979) An Assessment of the Image of Mexico as a Vacation Destination and the Influence of Geographical Location upon That Image. *Journal of Travel Research*, 17(4): 18-23. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/004728757901700404>
- Dadgostar, B. & Isotalo, R. (1992) Factors Affecting Time Spent by Near-Home Tourists in City Destinations. *Journal of Travel Research*, 31(2): 34-39. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/004728759203100206>
- Dickinger, A., Költringer, C., & Körbitz, W. (2011) Comparing Online Destination Image with Conventional Image Measurement — The Case of Tallinn. Information and Communication Technologies in Tourism 2011, 165-177. Proceedings of the International Conference in Innsbruck, Austria: 26-28 January 2011 doi:10.1007/978-3-7091-0503-0\_14
- Echtner, C. M., & Ritchie, J. R. B. (1993). The measurement of destination image: An empirical assessment. *Journal of Travel Research*, 31(4), 3-13.
- Fodness, D. (1994) Measuring tourist motivation. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 21(3):555-581.
- Fodness, D. & Murray, B. (1997) Tourist information search. *Annals Of Tourism Research*, 24(3): 503-523. [http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/s0160-7383\(97\)00009-1](http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/s0160-7383(97)00009-1)

- Fotis, J., Buhalis, D., & Rossides, N. (2011) Social Media Impact on Holiday **Travel Planning**. *International Journal of Online Marketing*, 1(4), 1-19. <http://dx.doi.org/10.4018/ijom.2011100101>
- Gallarza, M., Saura, I., & García, H. (2002) Destination image. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 29(1), 56-78. Retrieved from [http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/s0160-7383\(01\)00031-7](http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/s0160-7383(01)00031-7)
- Gartner, W. (1994) Image Formation Process. *Journal of Travel & Tourism Marketing*, 2(2-3), 191-216. [http://dx.doi.org/10.1300/j073v02n02\\_12](http://dx.doi.org/10.1300/j073v02n02_12)
- Jeng, J., & Fesenmaier, D. (2002) Conceptualizing the Travel Decision-Making Hierarchy: A **Review** of Recent Developments. *Tourism Analysis*, 7(1): 15-32. <http://dx.doi.org/10.3727/108354202108749925>
- Kassarjian, H. (1977). Content Analysis in Consumer Research. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 4(1), 8-18. Retrieved from <http://dx.doi.org/10.1086/208674>
- Kladou, S., & Mavragani, E. (2015). Assessing destination image: An online marketing approach **and the case** of TripAdvisor. *Journal of Destination Marketing & Management*, 4(3), 187-193. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.jdmm.2015.04.003>
- Krippendorff, K. (2004). Reliability in content analysis. *Human Communication Research* **Human Communication Research**, 30(3), 411-433. doi:10.1111/j.1468-2958.2004.tb00738.x
- Lange-Faria, W., & Elliot, S. (2012). Understanding the role of social media in destination marketing. *Tourism: An International Multidisciplinary Journal of Tourism*, 7(1), 193-211.
- Litvin, S. W., & Hoffman, L. M. (2012) Responses to consumer-generated media in the hospitality marketplace: An empirical study. *Journal of Vacation Marketing*, 18(2), 135-45.
- Litvin, S. W., Goldsmith, R. E. & Pan, B. (2008). Electronic Word-of-mouth in Hospitality **and Tourism** Management. *Tourism Management*, 29(3), 458-68.
- Lopes, S. D. F. (2011). Destination image: Origins, developments and implications. *Revista De Turismo* **Turismo**, 9(2), 305-15.
- Mackay, K. J., & Fesenmaier, D. R. (2000). An exploration of cross-cultural destination image assessment. *Journal of Travel Research*, 38(4), 417-23.
- Martín, H. S., & Bosque, I. A. (2008). Exploring the cognitive-affective nature of destination image and the role of psychological factors in its formation. *Tourism Management*, 29(2), 263-277. doi:10.1016/j.tourman.2007.03.012
- Munar, A. M. (2012). Social media strategies and destination management. *Scandinavian Journal of Hospitality and Tourism*, 12(2), 101-20.
- Pan, B., Maclaurin, T., & Crofts, J. C. (2007) Travel Blogs and the Implications for **Destination Marketing**. *Journal of Travel Research*, 46(1): 35-45. doi:10.1177/0047287507302378
- Salazar, N. (2007). Towards a Global Culture of Heritage Interpretation? Evidence from **Indonesia and Tanzania**. *Tourism Recreation Research*, 32(3), 23-30. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/02508281.2007.11081536>
- STATISTICS OF TOURIST ARRIVAL IN THE STATE OF SIKKIM. (n.d.). <http://sikkimtourism.gov.in/Webforms/General/DepartmentStakeholders/TouristArrivalStats.aspx> Accessed the 5th January 2017, at 09:00
- Tang, L., Choi, S., Morrison, A. M., & Lehto, X. Y. (2009). The many faces of Macau: A **correspondence** analysis of the images communicated by online tourism information sources in English and Chinese. *Journal of Vacation Marketing*, 15(1), 79-94. doi:10.1177/1356766708098173
- Tussyadiah, I. P., & Fesenmaier, D. R. (2009). Mediating tourist experiences. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 36(1), 24-40. doi:10.1016/j.annals.2008.10.001
- Vincent, S., & Vickery, G. (2016). Participative Web: User-created content (pp. 15-16). Retrieved **in** <http://www.oecd.org/sti/38393115.pdf>
- Zeng, B., & Gerritsen, R. (2014). What do we know about social media in tourism? A **review**: *Tourism Management Perspectives*, 10(1), 27-36. doi:10.1016/j.tmp.2014.01.001