

Participatory Culture and Tourist Experience: Promoting Destinations Through YouTube



Arabela Briciu and Victor-Alexandru Briciu

Abstract Social media tools are viewed as important sources for the tourism sector and different types of consumers and travellers. This article presents the role and the impact of YouTube, as the main video sharing solution in the online environment, for the development of what is called prosumer, the user which generates, circulates and consumes online knowledge and being part of the participatory culture. The goal of this research is to investigate the extent to which social media and YouTube in particular appear to be part of the spreadable media phenomenon, the capacity of the information to be shared among users. The study used a research design by selecting the first 100 video clips promoted by YouTube and addressing the theme of Bran Castle (also known as Dracula Castle) from Braşov, Transylvania region in Romania, uploaded by different categories of users. For the analysis of the results, this paper used elements of descriptive statistics from YouTube and methods of quantitative content analysis, regarding the YouTube video characteristics such as the frequencies of views, comments, appreciations (likes, dislikes), channel subscribers etc. This study shows that YouTube is considered to be important for the development of the tourist industry as it provides travellers with new practices for choosing their destination after viewing video materials.

Keywords Participatory culture · YouTube · Social media

1 Introduction

Tourism is one of the world's largest economic sector, with a "10.4% contribution to the global GDP in 2018, and 319 million jobs, or 10% of the total employment in 2018", it had a 3.9 global GDP growth, comparative with the 3.2% growth of the whole economy [1]. One important factor to this growth is the increasing rate of

A. Briciu (✉) · V.-A. Briciu
Transilvania University of Braşov, Braşov, Romania
e-mail: arabela.baican@unitbv.ro

© Springer Nature Switzerland AG 2020
A. Kavoura et al. (eds.), *Strategic Innovative Marketing and Tourism*,
Springer Proceedings in Business and Economics,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-36126-6_47

425

Millennials (born between 1980 and 2000) outbound trips, the largest age group for international travel, known to be “well-informed before travelling and using more source of information for travel planning” [2].

So, now that the digital natives [3, 4] or the Net generation [5] are an important public for tourism services and traveling, a very important source of information is the Internet with the shift to Web 2.0 [6], from a passive and consumer-oriented Internet experience to a decentralized and interactive hype of networking with a more active experience based on cooperation and user-generated content. The Internet and social media tools can influence and become part of the life of individuals, the environment in which they carry out their activities and all that surrounds them and “this technology ought to be perceived as a resource that can be utilized by social and political movements looking for a communication infrastructure to promote their cause” [7]. Social media is “an umbrella phrase for social-networking sites, virtual worlds, social news and bookmarking sites, wikis, and forums and opinion sites” ([8], p. 20), is the buzzword: “user-generated content” or content that is contributed by participants rather than editors [9], or the content communities “which organize and share particular kinds of content. The most popular content communities tend to form around photos (Flickr), bookmarked links (del.icio.us) and videos (YouTube)” [10].

The impact or influence of social media over the components of consumer behaviour is discussed as a specific topic in literature [11]. YouTube, which is considered to be “the largest video sharing site” ([12], p. 1) is also the second site in global Internet engagement category provided by Alexa [13]. It is a form of niche television, a ‘meta business’ not shackled to schedules, a “platform for, and an aggregator of, content, but it is not a content producer itself” ([14], p. 4). Since YouTube’s started in 2005, this platform received several changes in design and functionality and now is promoting social media influencers that are described as “new type of independent third party endorser who shape audience attitudes through blogs, tweets, and the use of other social media” ([12], p. 2). This paper aims to address the extent to which social media and YouTube in particular appears to be part of the tourism sector, as the main video sharing solution in the online environment.

2 Literature Review

Participatory culture refers to a type of “culture in which fans and other consumers are invited to actively participate in the creation and circulation of new content” ([15], p. 290). It is also an alternative to media power and is the opposite of mass culture.

A very interesting aspect here is the differentiation between what a ‘fan’ means and what a ‘consumer’ means because basically the two terms are linked to each other, rather the term consumer being the expression of a person who comes into contact with cultural content before becomes a fan. Our own identities are today

built more and more in relation to what a consumer society means because there is no middle way. From this point of view, “the consumer industries increasingly appeal to the possibilities of investing in popular images, pleasures, fantasies and desires. The fact that we relate to these appeals, as either consumers or fans, does not guarantee our subjugation to the interests or practices of the commercial sector” ([16], p. 63). After forming in the group as consumers or fans, the next step is the idea of building subcultures [17] and cultural exchanges [18] that through the content they build a true post-cultural reality.

So, from the literature consulted, we can state that in participating culture, each member can make his personal contribution, members who are newer can be guided by those who are part of the group for a long time and can be made aware of what is happening, each have both rights and obligations which must be respected and which are the basis for good functioning. Another very important element that the fans build in participatory culture and which is also a merit of them is that they gain more and more power as consumers of cultural content, “creating content as well as consuming it” ([19], p. 67), becoming ‘prosumers’. The term is considered to be “the apparent link between more accessible digital technologies, user created content, and some kind of shift in the power relations between media industries and their consumers” ([14], p. 10).

On platforms for sharing videos as sources of participatory culture, such as YouTube, is more about “cultural and political questions: who gets to speak, and who gets the attention; what compensations or rewards there are for creativity and work; and the uncertainties around various forms of expertise and authority” ([14], p. 11). Also, “consumer co-creation is fundamental to YouTube’s value proposition as well as to its disruptive influence on established media business models. When we think in this way, we can begin to think about how YouTube matters in terms of culture. For YouTube, participatory culture is not a gimmick or a sideshow; it is absolutely core business.” ([14], pp. 5–6). Another very important concept in terms of presenting travel experiences through YouTube spreadable media. This new idea “focuses on the social logics and cultural practices that have enabled and popularized these new platforms, logics that explain why sharing has become such common practice, not just how” ([20], p. 3). Discussing about the spreadable practice, the use of ‘spreadability’ or the capacity to be shareable, addresses “to the technical resources that make it easier to circulate some kinds of content than others, the economic structures that support or restrict circulation, the attributes of a media text that might appeal to a community’s motivation for sharing material, and the social networks that link people through the exchange of meaningful bytes” ([20], p. 4). It worth to mention at this point the differentiation that is made between to concepts: spreadability and stickiness [20].

The final remarks take in consideration the “important role in both shaping a destination’s/product image and in counteracting any negative perceptions” ([21], p. 3) and “the importance of social media in online travel information” ([22], p. 181), as the user-generated content (UGC) in social media [23, 24] or consumer-generated content (CGC) shared online [6] is being discussed.

In the current research the focus is directed to the extent to which social media and YouTube in particular appear to be part of the spreadable media phenomenon, the capacity of the information uploaded to be shared among users. Additionally, this review of the main concepts of the study, including tourism related literature has outlined the importance and the role of online characteristics for a destination image, as Bran Castle (also known as Dracula Castle) [25] from Braşov, Transylvania region in Romania.

3 Methodological Considerations

Bran Castle is one of the most important Romanian touristic destination and the most visited destination of Braşov County, being very popular for foreign tourists; over 60% of tourists are foreigners [26]. The main attractions of this destination are the associations with the mystical and legendary figure of Dracula, being well known as Dracula's Castle. This is also a good constitutive for participatory culture, the shared fantasies giving the content more 'spreadability' ([20], pp. 202–204) and a way to keep a relevant online presence in order to attract potential tourists that are planning their next trip.

The aim of this study is to describe the typical patterns and characteristics of YouTube videos regarding Bran Castle as a touristic destination and to identify important relationships among the video content and the elements of participatory culture. The main objectives are to identify and describe the characteristics of participatory culture regarding tourist experience at Bran Castle, to identify and describe the relationship among the characteristics and also to understand the differences of popularity and videos impact on audiences. To analyse these characteristics a data set of videos using the English keywords "Bran Castle" on YouTube search engine was compiled during the first 2 weeks of July 2019. A common indicator for the subject popularity on YouTube is the number of views. We therefore used the filter "view count" and selected the top 100 most viewed videos on this subject. The research has been descriptive, using both quantitative and qualitative content analysis. How many were out of total?

4 Results

The total view of the analysed videos was over 5.87 million viewers with an exposure of 37,884,674 (the total amount of subscribers for the channels that upgraded the content). 74 of them had in the title the expression "Dracula's Castle" and most of them had the title and the contents in English, but also one video in Indian, Czech, Turkish, and Chinese. The content in this sample was upload between 28th of January 2007 and 23rd of November 2018, with more than half (51%) of the videos uploaded in 2018, 2017 and 2016. Most important elements

Table 1 Summary statistics for YouTube videos

Statistics	Total	Mean	STD	Minimum	Median	Maximum
Video views	5,876,678	58,767	102,840.12	2604	14,284	562,456
Video duration (min)	822	8:19	9:07	0:18	5:06	61
Video likes	67,123	671.23	2052.08	6	91	18,000
Video dislikes	2948	29.48	69.37	0	6	438
Number of commentaries	10,176	106	292.67	0	17	2456
Subscribers	37,884,674	378,846.74	1,241,713.62	0	4419	8,626,667

of the participatory culture, referring to involvement of users are the commentaries, likes and dislikes. As a whole, the content of the entire sample received an amount of 67,123 likes, 2948 dislikes and 10,176 commentaries.

As can be seen in Table 1, these 100 most viewed videos about Bran Castle reaches a generous online audience with a maximum number of 562,456 views and a median number of 14,284 views per video. The most viewed video was “Exploring Dracula’s Castle At Night—Found Disturbing Room” by the channel “Exploring with Josh”, uploaded on 29th of October 2018, the content receiving also the greatest number of likes and dislikes, and being the most commented video in the sample (2456). It depicts the “strange” experience of a private tour “with the lights off” of the “entire” castle during a night near Halloween holiday (a “Halloween” special), highlighted by the expression of the feelings and the emotions of the filming crew, and also by the background music and the sound effects. All of these elements assure the stickiness and the spreadability of the content.

To explore more the popularity and the participation in constructing Bran castle destination image we focus on two major aspects of the videos: the general activity of the channel that uploaded the content and the expression of the touristic experience within the content.

First classification of the sample regarding the activity of the channel that upload the content comprise of 13 categories: travel and lifestyle vlogs (31%), Bran Castle official channel (4%), travel channels (12%), personal channels (30%), lifestyle channel (7%), journalism/news outlets (5%), paranormal research (4%), gaming channels (2%), entertainment (1%), product channels (1%), tech channels (1%), documentary (history) channels (1%), kids channels (1%).

The most viewed content was uploaded by vloggers (2,206,855 views), personal channels (1,071,881 views) and travel channels (994,867 views). By far the most interactive content is the one uploaded by vloggers with 69.12% of total likes (46,398 likes), 54.82% of total dislikes and 55.70% of total commentaries. Also, if we look at the number of comments as a measure of interactivity we can see the content uploaded by paranormal research and the gaming channels gaining a lot of feedback and positive reactions (the rate of likes vs. dislikes) and also presenting the touristic destination to different categories of public.

Comparing the first two most viewed categories we observed that the vlogging content mostly was upload recently, with 2017 as median year of upload, while the

content uploaded by personal channels is older with 2011 as median year of upload. Other older uploaded content than on the personal channels is represented by the journalistic channels with 2009 as median year of upload.

A second classification identified in this research was by the video content, and 14 categories were defined: (1) tourist experience regarding Bran Castle (22%); (2) tourist experience regarding Bran Castle and others attractions: Peleş Castle, Râşnov Fortress, Braşov Old Town, Black Church, Transylvania, Bucharest, Romania (9%); (3) tourist experience regarding others attractions with marginal mention of Bran Castle (2%); (4) paranormal experience (3%); (5) video tour of Bran Castle with text presentation (5%); (6) video tour of Bran Castle without presentation (20%); (7) video tour of Bran Castle and other Romanian tourist attractions without presentation (3%); (8) Photo tour with text presentation (5%); (9) photo tour without presentation (4%); (10) photo tour of Bran Castle and other Romanian tourist attractions with text presentation (1%); (11) events experience at Bran Castle (8%); (12) reportage and news outlets (15%); (13) Documentary (1%); (14) gaming experience related with the subject of Bran Castle (3%).

As we described that the most frequent categories of content are tourist experience regarding Bran Castle (22%) and video tour of Bran Castle without presentation (20%)—those categories being very different, because the first one is based on the association between the touristic experience and tourist identity and the second one is described “from the outside”—you don’t feel the participation of the uploader, the relationship between the user and the content. This observation is also obvious when we look at the degree of interactivity, first category gathering 6264 commentaries (61.56% of total commentaries), 46,691 likes (69.56% of total likes), and 1561 dislikes (52.95% of total dislikes), and the second category received 472 commentaries (4.64% of total commentaries), 4517 likes (6.73% of total likes) and 213 dislikes (7.23% of total dislikes).

Regarding this classification, the vloggers uploaded content focused on: tourist experience regarding Bran Castle (52%), tourist experience regarding Bran Castle and others attractions: Peleş Castle, Râşnov Fortress, Braşov Old Town, Black Church, Transylvania, Bucharest, Romania (29%), tourist experience regarding others attractions with marginal mention of Bran Castle (3%), video tour of Bran Castle with text presentation (3%) and video tour of Bran Castle without presentation (13%), while the videos uploaded by the personal channels focused on: video tour of Bran Castle without presentation (30%), photo tour without presentation (10%), events experience at Bran Castle (17%), tourist experience regarding Bran Castle (13%), tourist experience regarding others attractions with marginal mention of Bran Castle (3%), video tour of Bran Castle with text presentation (7%), video tour of Bran Castle and other Romanian tourist attractions without presentation (7%), photo tour with text presentation (3%), reportage and news outlets (7%), gaming experience related with the subject of Bran Castle (3%).

5 Discussion

It is very interesting the fact that the second most viewed video of Bran Castle is uploaded by the castle's official YouTube channel (470,588 views), and it is a video tour of the building without presentation but also embedded on the main page of the official website, the number one result on Google search engine. This video in contrast with the others top ten viewed videos of Bran Castle has a smaller degree of interactivity regarding the commentaries (82), but a positive image gathering 1000 likes and just 40 dislikes. This type of video content with embedded codes "make it easier to spread videos across the Internet, and encouraging access points to that content in a variety of places" ([20], p. 6).

Given the fact that nowadays it is very easy to spread videos worldwide, this type of content is gaining power in the industry and the touristic destinations need to have a good marketing strategy related to the content upload by various people, mainly the travel and lifestyle vloggers.

6 Conclusion

In conclusion, this research showed that the most relevant and captivating online content about Bran Castle as a touristic destination is revealed in vlogs. This type of content is most viewed on YouTube and also gets more reactions and involvement from the audience. The vloggers emphasize their experiences lived as tourists trying to be catchy and authentic, combining myths with history and information with emotions and feelings. Beside the relevant information for a possible tourist, like attractions to explore, how to reach there, where to sleep, where and what to eat, the vloggers must add something different, something particular—their contribution to depicting the touristic destination, this giving a more intimate experience with their followers (subscribers).

But also it's very hard to be authentic and often online success encourages duplication, and this was seen in many vlogs analysed, some ideas of experience being repeating—like the special night tour experience in the Halloween season. Also, the tourist experience is direct related with the possibilities offered by the actors involved with the management of the touristic destination and the nearby attractions.

References

1. World Travel & Tourism Council (2019) Travel & tourism economical impact 2019 world. <https://www.wttc.org/-/media/files/reports/economic-impact-research/regions-2019/world-2019.pdf>

2. ITB Berlin (2019) World travel trends 2018/2019, prepared by IPK International. https://www.itb-kongress.de/media/itbk/itbk_dl_all/ITB_2019_WTTR_Factsheets_ALL_Web_4.pdf
3. Palfrey J, Gasser U (2008) *Born digital: understanding the first generation of digital natives*. Basic Books, New York
4. Serazio M (2015) Selling (digital) millennials: the social construction and technological bias of a consumer generation. *Telev New Media* 16:599–615. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1527476413491015>
5. Tapscott D (2009) *Grown up digital: how the net generation is changing your world*. McGraw-Hill, New York
6. Hays S, Page SJ, Buhalis D (2013) Social media as a destination marketing tool: its use by national tourism organisations. *Curr Issue Tour* 16:211–239. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13683500.2012.662215>
7. Furedi F (2015) http://www.frankfuredi.com/article/how_the_internet_and_social_media_are_changing_culture1
8. Tuten TL (2008) *Advertising 2.0: social media marketing in a web 2.0 world*. Praeger, Westport
9. Boyd D (2009) Social media is here to stay . . . now what? Microsoft Research TechFest, Redmond, WA. <https://www.danah.org/papers/talks/MSRTechFest2009.html>
10. Mayfield A (2008) What is social media? https://www.icrossing.com/uk/sites/default/files_uk/insight_pdf_files/What%20is%20Social%20Media_iCrossing_ebook.pdf
11. Fotis J, Buhalis D, Rossides N (2011) Social media impact on holiday travel planning: the case of the Russian and the FSU markets. *Int J Online Mark* 1(4):1–19. <https://doi.org/10.4018/ijom.2011100101>
12. Schwemmer C, Ziewiecki S (2018) Social media sellout: the increasing role of product promotion on YouTube. *Social Media Soc* 4:1–20. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2056305118786720>
13. [YouTube.com](https://www.youtube.com) Competitive analysis, marketing mix and traffic. <https://www.alexa.com/siteinfo/youtube.com>
14. Burgess J, Green J (2009) *YouTube: online video and participatory culture*. Polity Press, Malden
15. Jenkins H (2006) *Convergence culture: where old and new media collide*. New York University Press, New York
16. Grossberg L (1992) Is there a fan in the house?: The affective sensibility of fandom. In: Lewis LA (ed) *The adoring audience: fan culture and popular media*. Routledge, London, pp 50–68
17. Sweetman P (2004) Tourists and travellers? “Subcultures”, reflexive identities and neo-tribal sociality. In: Bennett A, Kahn-Harris K (eds) *After subculture: critical studies in contemporary youth culture*. Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, pp 79–93
18. Green J, Jenkins H (2009) The moral economy of Web 2.0: audience research and convergence culture. In: Holt J, Perren A (eds) *Media industries: history, theory, and method*. Blackwell, Malden, pp 213–225
19. Larabie CL (2011) Participatory culture and the hidden costs of sharing. *McMaster J Commun* 7:66–88
20. Jenkins H, Ford S, Green J (2013) *Spreadable media – creating value and meaning in a networked culture*. New York University Press, New York
21. Reino S, Hay B (2016) The use of YouTube as a tourism marketing tool. *Travel and tourism research association: advancing tourism research globally*, vol 69. <https://scholarworks.umass.edu/tra/2011/Visual/69>
22. Xiang Z, Gretzel U (2010) Role of social media in online travel information search. *Tour Manag* 31:179–188. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2009.02.016>
23. Nechita F, Demeter R, Briciu V-A, Kavoura A, Varelas S (2019) Analysing projected destination images versus visitor-generated visual content in Brasov, Transylvania. In: Kavoura A, Kefallonitis E, Giovanis A (eds) *Strategic innovative marketing and tourism*. Springer, Cham, pp 613–622. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-12453-3_70

24. Briciu V-A, Nechita F, Demeter R, Kavoura A (2019) Minding the gap between perceived and projected destination image by using information and communication platforms and software. *Int J Comput Methods Herit Sci* 3:1–17. <https://doi.org/10.4018/IJCMHS.2019070101>
25. Candrea AD, Ispas A, Untaru EN, Nechita F (2016) Marketing the Count's way: how Dracula's myth can revive Romanian tourism. *Transilvania University of Braşov* 9:83–90
26. Biz Brasov. <https://www.bizbrasov.ro/2018/01/15/castelul-bran-vizitat-de-pestre-830-000-de-turisti-anul-trecut-brandul-castelul-lui-dracula-adus-venituri-de-pestre-6-milioane-de-euro/>