

Tourists' Engagement on Tourism Organizations' Facebook Pages: The Role of User-Generated Content

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Abstract: Tourism industry prospects are presented by digital marketing and consumer travel behaviour changes. Given this fact, digital content marketing (DCM) assumes greater significance for enhancing social media user engagement. Providing valuable and relevant information that differentiates the company and catches the consumers' attention has been one of the current challenges in this area. The wide availability of information on the Internet changes how consumers engage with it. Therefore, creating and disseminating educational and pertinent content is now mandatory. To ensure the effectiveness of the process, it is crucial to understand with whom, how, when, and where communication will be carried out. Thus, tourism organisations must offer targeted, tailored, and appealing information to interest customers more about the destinations. Social media is a commonly used strategy for tourism promotion initiatives, where User Generated Content (UGC) has emerged as one of the most popular means to achieve this goal. "Turismo Centro de Portugal" is responsible for publicizing the Centre region of Portugal, including cities such as Coimbra, Aveiro, Viseu, and Leiria. Turismo Centro de Portugal has won several communication-related awards, having already been recognized internationally for its advertising campaigns. Numerous studies analyzing user-generated content and digital content are available, but they invariably look at businesses rather than tourism-related institutions. Hence, conducting a study to identify follower engagement and involvement in digital content marketing posts versus user-generated content posts applied to the Turismo Centro de Portugal was considered pertinent. For this purpose, a qualitative analysis of the existing content and its results on Turismo Centro de Portugal's Facebook page was developed based on a social media content analysis framework adapted from other authors. The results revealed the importance of using user-generated content in a social media communication strategy for tourism organisations.

Keywords: Engagement, Social media, Tourism organisations, User-Generated content

1. Introduction

Consumers have long been regarded as passive recipients of marketing messages, as one-way communication only allowed consumers to receive the information that marketers thought appropriate (Ukpabi & Karjaluoto, 2018). With Web 2.0, the evolving technological landscape has given rise to innovative and distinctive communication methods, where digital content marketing (DCM) is widely used. Marketers and customers now have a place to express themselves and connect easily and quickly. As more people use digital environments, businesses often witness user-generated content (UGC) about their products and services published online, and many support their development (Yang et al., 2019). Consumers can obtain helpful information about brands and products from UGC. As a result, there is a change in their actions and decisions as this kind of content influences them more and more. Because users share UGC with an unbiased opinion, consumers consider it more trustworthy than firm-generated content (FGC), which may be spreading misinformation to increase sales. Thus, there is a need to integrate FGC with UGC, an ongoing challenge for marketers (Daugherty et al., 2008). In tourism, UGC has become an effective tool for tourists to gather information to make travel decisions. Users can improve the free travel information offered to potential travelers by sharing their experiences through words, pictures, and videos (Tsao et al., 2015). To ascertain which of the two types of tools has greater user engagement and preference, this research will examine the posts of both digital content marketing and user-generated content on the official Facebook page of Turismo Centro de Portugal. For this, variables will be analyzed, including the number of likes, comments, shares, content type and format, and level of interactivity.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Digital Content Marketing (DCM), Firm Generated-Content (FGC), and User Generated-Content (UGC)

Digital Content Marketing (DCM) strategies are increasingly used in the tourism industry. This concept is defined as the regular generation of practical, appropriate, and engaging information designed to positively impact a brand's or potential customers' behaviour (Pulizzi, 2012). Digital Content Marketing can be disseminated on various platforms, such as social media, both from a UGC and an FGC perspective (Sawaftah et al., 2021).

Understanding the concepts of "firm-generated content" and "user-generated content" is essential as they have been the subject of increasing research (Choi & Lee, 2017; Al-Abdallah & Jumaa, 2022). FGC is considered any information businesses produce to be communicated directly via social media platforms (Kumar et al., 2016). Examples of FGC on social media include posts made by the company promoting the launch of new products or the release of the latest deals, whether done in the form of text, photos, or videos (Al-Abdallah & Jumaa, 2022). By fostering a well-rounded relationship, FGC seeks to educate, engage, and communicate with customers (Poulis et al., 2019). Tourism-related businesses distribute information on digital channels to pique the interest of potential customers and encourage their interaction with the publications (Tsiakali, 2018).

UGC is user-created, brand-specific content published by consumers on social media or other platforms (Tirunillai & Tellis, 2012). UGC not only aids the firm in refining its products and services to receive good feedback, but it also assists other customers in gathering accurate information and influencing their purchasing decisions (Ukpabi & Karjaluo, 2018). There are a variety of UGC formats, not all of which are qualitative, such as reviews and opinions (Müller & Christandl, 2019). Often this comes in the form of demonstrative images and videos users capture. Comparing UGC to other sources of information, it is seen to be more trustworthy and truthful since it is produced and shared by unbiased individuals without regard to profit. Due to this, many companies are interested in integrating UGC into their marketing plans. Due to being able to provide accurate and current information about famous tourist sites and practical travel advice, UGC has grown in appeal among tourists. Thus, travellers' choices and tourism entities' management have been significantly affected by the expansion of UGC on social media (Xu et al., 2021).

It is essential to comprehend the differences between these two ideas: UGC refers to the content shared directly by customers, whereas FGC is entirely the company's responsibility. While UGC can positively influence the growth of social media communities, FGC is a more effective tool for enhancing brand recognition and drawing new members into companies' social media communities (Schultz & Peltier, 2013). Both are essential for brand development, growing destination awareness and informing consumers and tourists.

2.2 Importance of Social Media on Tourism

Social media has played a considerable role in the travel and tourism industry, particularly in information sharing and research, significantly impacting traveller behaviour and decisions (Zeng & Gerritsen, 2014). They also operate as consumer interaction and travel advertising platforms, strengthening the company-consumer bond. Digital networks like Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, and others are now widely used by society. Thus, companies increasingly recognize that social media is among the most effective ways to communicate with a broad audience. Additionally, it is an excellent resource for understanding consumers' opinions towards the brand. Customer engagement on digital platforms is a significant catalyst that drives value creation and is an essential strategy in the tourism industry (Chathoth et al., 2014).

Facebook is undoubtedly the digital platform that sticks out the most from the others used to engage with customers. This platform has had an unprecedented user acceptance rate in less than a decade and has strongly infiltrated people's daily lives (Hausman et al., 2014). These platforms allow the company to create a profile and publish different types of content. In return, consumers can respond through likes, comments, and shares. This way, the bonds between the users and the company strengthen (Wallace et al., 2012), increasing loyalty and brand awareness. There are several motivations for using social media. According to Al-Menayes (2015), these include entertainment, personal use, information seeking, convenience, and altruism. The motivations behind travellers posting information about their trips on social media are also diverse. The most relevant, based on a study by Munar and Jacobsen (2014), is to help others through tips and advice to have a good experience. In addition, maintaining social ties and contributing to websites they find beneficial are significant considerations.

2.3 Social Media Users' Engagement

Users can express appreciation and value for the company's messages by interacting with them. Likes and comments are the most popular ways to interact on Facebook. Through these actions, the post can be seen by the user and their social media friends (Wallace et al., 2012). Consequently, the post has a broader audience, and there is a possibility that more individuals will be interested in the goods or services being offered. The comment is another crucial indicator since it enables users to express their opinions publicly, whether they are reviews, criticisms, or recommendations (Hausman et al., 2014). However, not all users adopt an attitude of active participation. Internet users can be divided into four groups, as per Mathwick (2002): lurkers, socializers, individual connectors, and transactional community members. Whereas socializers engage in conversations,

supply feedback, and interact with brands, family, and friends, lurkers tend only to monitor the actions of other users.

Furthermore, Muntinga et al. (2011) argue that users can adopt one of three behaviour toward brand-related information shared on social media: a consumption, contribution, or creation mindset. Consumption users are individuals who, for example, view material (videos, photos, and audio) and read comments and feedback from others. Contributors adopt more active attitudes by evaluating products or companies and posting comments on social media. Lastly, the creators write reviews about brand-related things and post about products (UGC), being the most active and involved.

Vividness and interactivity are traits that posts can exhibit, determining their popularity (Fortin & Dholakia, 2005; de Vries et al., 2012). For example, vividness can awaken one or more senses through animations and colour contrast (Fortin & Dholakia, 2005). Goldfarb and Tucker (2011) suggest that interactivity represents a two-way communication (in this case, between the brand and the consumer) and can be accomplished through a link (Fortin & Dholakia, 2005), a question, or a call to action (de Vries et al., 2012). According to de Vries et al. (2012), the more vivid the posts are, the more likes they receive. By way of explanation, posts with a high level of vividness, like videos, tend to receive more likes than pictures. Regarding the number of comments, vividness is not a deciding factor; instead, postings with high levels of interactivity (questions and quizzes) would attract more comments because they are activities that require a response from the user (de Vries et al., 2012). Call-to-action (CTA) is another tactic to encourage viewers to interact with a social media post (Surucu-Balci et al., 2020). Sentences like "comment now," "learn more," "click here" are examples of commonly used CTAs.

2.3.1 Case study - Turismo Centro de Portugal

Tourism drives global prosperity and social progress. Portugal has always been regarded as a nation of great interest and focus for many cultures, and it is currently acknowledged as a credible and famous tourist destination. The country is unique and captivating due to its varied cultural history and unique traditions. With its hospitality, cuisine, and pleasant atmosphere, Portugal is considered a destination of choice by many (Ramos & Costa, 2017, p. 25). Turismo Centro de Portugal is responsible for developing tourism in the central region. Over the years, this entity has won several communication awards highlighting the country as a great travel destination and strengthening the reputation of Portuguese tourism. The tourism industry is going through a period of rapid technological advancement. Hence Turismo Centro de Portugal concentrates on a digitally focused communication strategy. Therefore, Turismo Centro de Portugal's most recent marketing plan emphasizes efforts on the website, Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter (Turismo Centro de Portugal, 2020). These platforms are excellent for drawing customers' attention, learning about their preferences, and establishing relationships.

3. Methodology

The methodology used was qualitative, using the case study of Turismo Centro de Portugal. Facebook was used as the digital platform for the research. This decision was made because millions of people widely use this platform, which allows direct contact with the consumer (Piranda et al., 2022) and dynamically promotes tourism (Okazaki et al., 2016).

The official account of Turismo Centro de Portugal (<https://www.facebook.com/turismodocentro>) was used in the sample. It consists of 50 posts from the Turismo Centro de Portugal account from August 31, 2022, to November 13, 2022 (25 UGC and 25 DCM). UGC refers to posts that include images captured by tourists and subsequently shared by the Turismo Centro de Portugal. Digital Content Marketing (DCM) posts containing links and videos shared on Facebook by Turismo Centro de Portugal, mostly tips/suggestions, routes/guides, commemorative days, and press conferences, were considered. To ensure that the posts reach their maximum engagement potential, the analysis was only begun on December 20. In earlier engagement studies (Osokin, 2019), a sample of 50 postings was employed, which enabled the researchers to get detailed and reliable data.

Each post was evaluated according to its content: informative, entertainment, remuneration (Nugroho & Agustina, 2020) or interactive (de Vries et al., 2012) and media type (text, image, link, and video) (Cvijikj & Michahelles, 2013), the number of likes, comments, and shares (Rahman et al., 2017; Gruner & Rower, 2018; Medjani et al., 2019). Each was assessed to establish whether there were more positive or negative comments (Zell & Moeller, 2018). In addition, the engagement rate for each post (figure 1) was calculated as follows (Peruta & Shields, 2016):

$$\frac{\text{likes} + \text{comments} + \text{shares}}{\text{number of page likes at the end of sample date}} * 100$$

Figure 1: Engagement Rate Calculation (Peruta & Shields, 2016)

4. Data Analysis and Results

Table 1 summarizes the characteristics and engagement of the 50 posts (UGC and DCM) on the Facebook page of Turismo Centro de Portugal. From this table, it is possible to analyze the type and format of content, the interactions, and the engagement rate. After an analysis of all the posts, it was possible to find interactive posts (with questions in the description), informative posts (that report on the history of the sites, dates of events, among others), and CTA posts (that invite the user to take action). The formats viewed mainly were links, images, and some videos. The level of interaction with the post varies and is influenced by the factors above.

Table 1: Data Sample Descriptive Analysis

Date	Content	Format	Likes	Positive Comments	Negative Comments	Shares	Engagement Rate	UGC	DCM
Aug 31 st , 20:28	Informative/ Interactive	Image	101	2	0	4	0,07%	-	
Sep 1 st , 10:58	Informative/CTA	Image	53	0	0	4	0,04%	-	
Sep 1 st , 12:05	CTA	Image	186	0	0	18	0,14%	-	
Sep 2 nd , 13:32	CTA	Image	181	4	1	105	0,19%	-	
Sep 7 th , 11:49	CTA	Image	244	4	2	37	0,19%	-	
Sep 8 th , 18:56	Quote	Image	150	4	0	9	0,10%	-	
Sep 12 th , 19:11	Informative/ Interactive	Link	33	0	0	7	0,03%		-
Sep 13 th , 10:17	Informative/ Interactive	Image	51	0	0	13	0,04%	-	
Sep 15 th , 12:03	Informative	Link	40	0	0	6	0,03%		-
Sep 16 th , 19:15	Informative	Image	129	1	0	12	0,09%	-	
Sep 16 th , 21:37	Quote	Image	179	0	0	17	0,13%	-	
Sep 17 th , 19:24	Informative/CTA	Link	70	0	0	18	0,06%		-
Sep 18 th , 19:18	Informative/ Interactive	Image	147	4	0	76	0,15%	-	
Sep 19 th , 11:21	Informative/CTA	Link	26	0	0	13	0,03%		-
Sep 19 th , 14:40	Informative	Press Conference Video	31	0	0	10	0,03%		-
Sep 20 th , 19:13	Informative/ Interactive	Link	32	0	0	11	0,03%		-
Sep 21 st , 12:04	Informative	Link	87	0	0	13	0,07%		-

Date	Content	Format	Likes	Positive Comments	Negative Comments	Shares	Engagement Rate	UGC	DCM
Sep 24 th , 19:35	Informative/ Interactive	Image	61	3	0	9	0,05%	-	
Sep 25 th , 19:12	Interactive	Image	38	0	0	4	0,03%	-	
Sep 26 th , 12:15	CTA/Interactive	Image	84	2	1	8	0,06%	-	
Sep 27 th , 8:33	Informative/CTA	Video	37	0	0	18	0,04%		-
Sep 27 th , 19:05	Informative/CTA	Link	48	0	0	8	0,04%		-
Sep 30 th , 12:14	CTA/Interactive	Link	14	0	0	3	0,01%		-
Oct 1 st , 19:06	CTA/Interactive	Link	22	0	0	12	0,02%		-
Oct 2 nd , 19:35	Informative/CTA	Link	86	0	0	22	0,07%		-
Oct 7 th , 19:30	CTA	Link	59	1	0	5	0,04%		-
Oct 10 th , 12:15	CTA/Interactive	Image	186	1	0	39	0,15%	-	
Oct 13 th , 12:12	Interactive	Image	50	0	0	2	0,03%	-	
Oct 14 th , 12:14	CTA	Image	85	0	0	12	0,06%	-	
Oct 16 th , 19:25	CTA	Link	28	0	0	5	0,02%		-
Oct 17 th , 19:25	Informative	Link	133	0	0	32	0,11%		-
Oct 18 th , 12:28	Informative	Link	90	0	0	20	0,07%		-
Oct 19 th , 12:16	Informative	Image	365	5	0	87	0,30%	-	
Oct 20 th , 19:09	Informative	Link	59	0	0	6	0,04%		-
Oct 21 st , 19:23	CTA	Image	175	3	0	20	0,13%	-	
Oct 22 nd , 13:48	CTA	Link	33	0	0	4	0,02%		-
Oct 22 nd , 19:35	Interactive/CTA	Link	37	0	0	4	0,03%		-
Oct 23 rd , 13:06	Interactive/CTA	Link	22	0	0	3	0,02%		-
Oct 24 th , 20:34	Interactive	Image	290	7	0	24	0,21%	-	
Oct 25 th , 12:35	Informative/CTA	Link	56	0	0	8	0,04%		-
Oct 27 th , 12:27	Interactive/ Informative	Link	15	0	0	6	0,01%		-

Date	Content	Format	Likes	Positive Comments	Negative Comments	Shares	Engagement Rate	UGC	DCM
Oct 27 th , 20:12	Interactive	Image	24	0	0	4	0,02%	-	
Oct 30 th , 20:21	CTA/Interactive	Image	48	0	0	10	0,04%	-	
Oct 31 st , 12:23	Informative	Link	47	0	0	8	0,04%		-
Oct 31 st , 19:19	Informative	Link	27	0	0	5	0,02%		-
Nov 3 rd , 12:14	Informative	Link	47	0	0	10	0,04%		-
Nov 3 rd , 20:39	Interactive	Image	43	0	0	10	0,04%	-	
Nov 9 th , 20:32	Interactive/ Informative	Image	77	0	0	8	0,06%	-	
Nov 12 th , 20:18	Interactive/ Informative	Image	33	0	0	16	0,03%	-	
Nov 13 th , 19:48	Interactive	Image	55	1	0	7	0,04%	-	

The engagement rates for the Turismo Centro de Portugal page and the page of the user who posted it initially are compared in Table 2. From the credits given to the UGC shared on the Turismo Centro de Portugal Facebook page, the engagement of the original post on the user's page was analyzed. The pictures were spotted on Instagram accounts, mainly focused on photography and personal accounts. These accounts, by and large, have far fewer followers than Turismo Centro de Portugal. Overall, these accounts' engagement levels surpass those of the Turismo Centro de Portugal page, with the highest rate being 20.2%. The rates observed on the Turismo Centro de Portugal page, all below 1%, may be due to many followers, many of whom do not interact with the entity's posts.

Table 2: Comparison of Facebook Engagement on the Turismo Centro de Portugal Page and the User's Page

Date	Engagement Rate on Turismo Centro de Portugal's Facebook Page	Engagement Rate on Users' Page
Aug 31 st , 20:28	0,07%	-
Sep 1 st , 10:58	0,04%	1,29%
Sep 1 st , 12:05	0,14%	10,0%
Sep 2 nd , 13:32	0,19%	15,5%
Sep 7 th , 11:49	0,19%	2,32%
Sep 8 th , 18:56	0,10%	10,6%
Sep 13 th , 10:17	0,04%	10,8%
Sep 16 th , 19:15	0,09%	0,63%
Sep 16 th , 21:37	0,13%	10,8%
Sep 18 th , 19:18	0,15%	2,6%
Sep 24 th , 19:35	0,05%	3,5%
Sep 25 th , 19:12	0,03%	0,39%
Sep 26 th , 12:15	0,06%	-
Oct 10 th , 12:15	0,15%	1,32%
Oct 13 th , 12:12	0,03%	7,40%

Date	Engagement Rate on Turismo Centro de Portugal's Facebook Page	Engagement Rate on Users' Page
Oct 14 th , 12:14	0,06%	-
Oct 19 th , 12:16	0,30%	7,70%
Oct 21 st , 19:23	0,13%	2,62%
Oct 24 th , 20:34	0,21%	14,2%
Oct 27 th , 20:12	0,02%	1,53%
Oct 30 th , 20:21	0,04%	2,84%
Nov 3 rd , 20:39	0,04%	20,2%
Nov 9 th , 20:32	0,06%	7,07%
Nov 12 th , 20:18	0,03%	-
Nov 13 th , 19:48	0,04%	16,4%

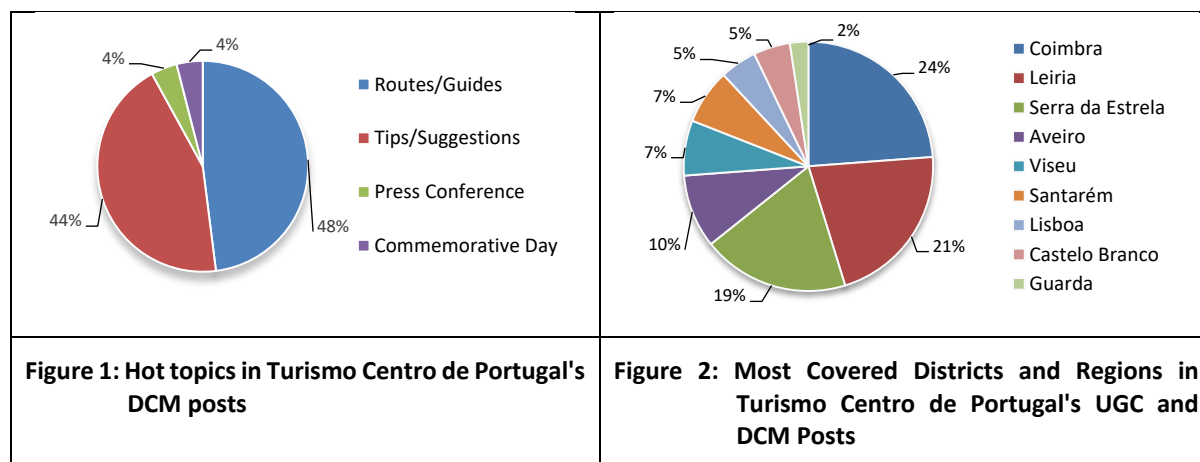
Table 3 descriptive data display the highest, average, and lowest engagement rates for UGC and DCM posts on the official Facebook page of Turismo Centro de Portugal. This evidence clarifies the difference in engagement rates between the two forms of shared information. Compared to DCM, UGC posts have a greater engagement rate, although it is still generally low.

Table 3: Overview and Comparison of Engagement of UGC and DCM Posts

	Engagement Rate	
	UGC	DCM
Average	0,10%	0,06%
Maximum	0,30%	0,15%
Minimum	0,02%	0,01%

Itineraries and travel guides represented most of the content shared in DCM posts, as seen in Figure 1. Additionally, tips and suggestions were supplied on where to go, what to see, and what to do while travelling. Posts honouring special days (such as World Tourism Day) and video press conferences were posted less often.

Throughout the 50 posts of Turismo Centro de Portugal (including those of DCM and UGC), various districts and sub-regions are addressed, as seen in Figure 2. The most addressed districts are Coimbra (24%), Leiria (21%), and Aveiro (10%). One of the most often discussed topics was the Serra da Estrela sub-region, which is split between the Guarda and Castelo Branco districts. The Schist Villages in different centre regions are also highly addressed in the analyzed posts.



5. Discussion

This study aims to ascertain the preferred social media content types among users. Both posts cover a range of subjects and include different central Portuguese districts and regions. The UGC posts had the most engagement. These posts mainly involve posting photos of places in central Portugal. The photos are often appealing, and because they display locations, residents, and lovers often like, comment, and share them out of pride.

Additionally, it provides a realistic representation of the location, sparking interest in travel and inspiring future excursions. Turismo Centro de Portugal's Facebook page followers were somewhat hesitant to interact with posts that contained an external link, similar to Osokin's (2018). Perhaps because of their growing interest in the post's topic, they leave the page and click the link without reading it any longer. On the other hand, they preferred posts in image format that did not imply having to leave the page they were on since these posts have a higher interaction rate.

A question in the description of a post acts as a highly interactive feature because it invites responses from the brand's followers (Vries et al., 2012). This was confirmed since interactive Turismo Centro de Portugal posts receive the most comments. However, there are fewer likes on the interactive postings examined, which is consistent with the findings of Vries et al. (2012). Posts that feature positive comments tend to get a higher number of likes. This proves the point of de Vries et al. (2012), who argues that sharing positive comments increases the post's allure. Encouraging the user to take action, be it commenting, visiting a location, or opening a link, has a positive effect on them. Posts with a CTA present showed relatively high interaction, with a high number of likes, comments, and shares, which is in line with the findings of Moran et al. (2019).

6. Conclusion

This research seeks to determine which type of social media content—UGC or DCM—users prefer to consume. To achieve this, the content, format, and engagement of 50 posts on Facebook by Turismo Centro de Portugal are examined. The information provided by these outcomes is crucial for informing marketers in tourism companies about the type of material users prefer. They may then concentrate their approach on encouraging the creation of this kind of content.

Turismo Centro de Portugal's Facebook followers prefer user-generated content since it generates more engagement than digital content marketing. This research is relevant as it demonstrates to tourism organizations the importance of encouraging tourists to share their experiences on social media and other digital platforms.

Although the study is considered pertinent, there are some limitations. This research focused only on user-generated content on Facebook, so it is suggested that a further study be conducted to analyze it from the firm-generated content perspective and in other social networks, such as Instagram. Given the methodology, the results can only be generalized to the Turismo Centro de Portugal entity.

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