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How travel UGC is different in the East and West and how that creates different tourism destination images

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Master in Marketing

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Abstract

This study explores the relationship between cultural differences and travel user-generated content (UGC) and UGC's effect on tourism destination image (TDI). The object is to investigate whether there is a difference in the travel UGC posted on between the East and West and whether that creates different TDIs between the two groups. This is done by analyzing the content posted on Instagram by people from Asian and Western countries about Bangkok and Paris. 1000 photos in total were collected from Instagram using relevant hashtags and coded according to twenty different categories. Even though in the end the most frequents categories for Asians and Westerners are mostly the same, their proportions varied and they clearly highlighted different aspects of the destinations. In Bangkok Asians focused on tourism facilities, Wat Arun and food, whereas Westerners posted about the urban landscape and a couple tourist attractions and showed the natural side more. In Paris on the other hand, Asians photographed the Eiffel Tower clearly the most, followed by regular buildings, restaurants and art. Westerners were equally interested tourist attractions and regular buildings and gave more of a casual view of the city while also presenting it as a metropolitan city. In conclusion, based on the sample, travel UGC is slightly different in East and West which suggests that there are different TDIs in the regions.

Keywords

User-Generated Content, Tourism Destination Image, Cultural Differences, Instagram, Bangkok, Paris

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M31 – Marketing

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Resumo

Este estudo explora a relação entre diferenças culturais e o conteúdo gerado pelo utilizador (CGU) de viagens, bem como o efeito do CGU na imagem do destino turístico (IDT). O propósito desta tese é investigar a existência de diferenças no CGU de viagens publicado no Oriente e no Ocidente e se tal origina diferentes imagem do destino turístico entre os dois grupos. Assim, o conteúdo no Instagram colocado por pessoas de países asiáticos e ocidentais, sobre Bangkok e Paris, foi analisado. No total, 1000 fotos do Instagram usando *hashtags* relevantes e classificadas de acordo com vinte categorias diferentes foram recolhidas. Em geral as categorias mais frequentes para asiáticos e ocidentais são as mesmas. Porém, as suas proporções variaram, destacando aspetos diferentes dos dois destinos. Em Bangkok, os asiáticos centram-se nas instalações turísticas, Wat Arun e comida, enquanto os ocidentais publicaram sobre a paisagem urbana e algumas atrações turísticas, mostrando mais o lado natural. Em Paris, por outro lado, os asiáticos fotografaram a Torre Eiffel, claramente como a atração mais importante, seguida por edifícios comuns, restaurantes e arte. Os ocidentais tinham igual interesse em atrações turísticas e edifícios comuns, mas apresentaram uma visão mais casual da cidade e retrataram-na como uma metrópole. Em conclusão, o CGU de viagens é ligeiramente diferente no Oriente e no Ocidente, o que sugere que existem diferentes IDT nas duas regiões.

Palavras chave

Conteúdo Gerado pelo Usuário, Imagem do Destino Turístico, Diferenças Culturais, Instagram, Bangkok, Paris

JEL

M31 – Marketing

Z32 – Turismo e Desenvolvimento

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Glossary

E-WOM – Electronic Word-of-Mouth

TDI – Tourism Destination Image

UGC – User-generated Content

WOM – Word-of-Mouth

1. Introduction

One-size-fits-all solutions are not enough in anymore. Instead of traditional tourism marketing, marketers need to see their target consumers as individuals and offer them more personalized promotional materials. For example, people from different cultural and geographical regions have different interests when they travel and additionally could experience and perceive destinations very differently. This is supported by findings from studies such as MacKay and Fesenmaier (2000) and Deng et al. (2019). Even though globalization has made our world smaller, it does not mean that there are not cultural differences that impact one's behaviors, preferences, and ways of interpreting stimuli (Hofstede, 1980; Kim et al., 2010; Pizam et al., 1997, as cited in Li, 2012). This needs to be well-thought-out by marketers in their efforts to promote tourism products and services, including destinations. Another important factor to consider in tourism marketing is the unofficial but impactful material that marketers cannot control – user-generated content. Not only have tourists have become destination promoters themselves but UGC is also generally viewed as more trustworthy than materials provided by official sources (Gurung & Goswami, 2016). This research will study the potential differences in the travel UGC posted by people from Asian and Western countries and whether those assumed differences impact tourism destination images, TDIs.

1.1 Tourism Industry

The importance of the global tourism industry is undeniable. It not only contributes to the world economy significantly, but also offers many opportunities for business and marketers thereafter. Before the COVID-19 pandemic in 2019 the tourism industry was worth staggering 10 trillion USD and even though the pandemic caused a setback, the industry has been forecasted to reach 9.5 trillion USD in 2023 post-pandemic, which means it has almost recovered completely (World Travel & Tourism Council, 2023). In order to fully capitalize on the opportunities offered by the tourism industry, careful thought and effort need to put in the marketing of tourism products and services. TDI refers to how people perceive a particular destination (Crompton, 1979; Echtner and Ritchie, 1993; MacKay & Fesenmaier, 2000) and is one of the most popular topics in tourism related research (Pike, 2002). Furthermore, TDI affects where people travel (Mayo, 1975, as cited in Jenkins, 1999). As the competition among destinations only continues to grow, it is important for destinations to be able to develop appealing and unique images that differentiates them from the rest (Stepchenkova & Zhan, 2013).

1.2 Marketing Campaigns

Social media sites have provided a platform for companies to do online marketing more effectively and use channels like Instagram to create viral marketing campaigns (Nguyen & Chaudhuri, 2019). Destination marketing campaigns impact people's opinions and can lead into an increase in visitors as they influence the visit intentions of possible visitors, according to Pesonen and Pasanen (2017, as cited in Arefieva et al., 2021). Therefore, A positive TDI does not only give a short-term benefit but affects the destination in the long-run. A good TDI marketing campaign can help overcome some negative perceptions people have about a destination. One great example of this is the "Incredible India" campaign. The campaign that started in 2002, and is still used in 2023, showcases India's diversity in cultures, its natural beauty, history in a visually captivating manner (Kaur, 2016). According to Kaur (2016), there was a 19% increase in the possibility of people considering India as a tourist destination, as a result of the campaign and Gulati (2022) states that in only the first year of the campaign, there was a 16% increase in visitor traffic.

Both affective and cognitive destination images influenced people's visit intention in the future significantly (Woomi & Jang, 2007). In 2023, Visit Finland launched "The Masterclass of Happiness" campaign on social media, another successful campaign tackled the affective image of the destination, in other words, how people feel about it (Sultan et al., 2021). People were asked to apply for a real, in-person masterclass held in Finland in the Summer of 2023 by posting content on Instagram or TikTok and tagging the official Finland tourism board accounts as well as using #findyourinnerfinn (Visit Finland, 2023). The campaign utilized Finland's ranking as the world's happiest country (Helliwell et al., 2023) to share a positive TDI. Visit Finland (2023) states that 150,000 entries were made, and that the masterclass was held in June 2013 for 14 winners, instead of the originally planned 10 winners. These two examples demonstrate how important TDI is in tourism destination marketing and how marketers can combat negative TDIs and build on positive ones in order to attract more tourists.

1.3 The Role of Social Media in Tourism

An important player in TDI creation is social media, that was also a key part of Visit Finland's campaign. Brands cannot ignore the fact that their reputation and customer loyalty are strongly dependent on people's content on social media platforms (Alberghini et al., 2014). People not only share photos of their own travels on social media sites, like Instagram, but also get new

information from their peers' and influencers' content (Garay, 2019). UGC, user-generated content, as a phenomenon is a crucial factor for marketers to understand and use correctly, and it will likely only become more and more central in the coming years. Because of its casual nature and natural part in our everyday lives, social media is the most important source of information for many consumers (Lo et al., 2011; Gurung & Goswami, 2016). The role of E-WOM, electronic word-of-mouth, in the decision-making process cannot be understated and just like everything else, it also impacts our perceptions of travel destinations and might even lead to increased intention to visit a destination (Gurung & Goswami, 2016; Alcázar et al., 2014; Iglesias-Sánchez et al., 2020). While marketers nowadays have less control over TDIs because of social media and E-WOM, travel UGC does not mean that marketers do not have any influence anymore. In the contrary, there are many ways that tourism brands can use UGC to their advantage (Akerhurst, 2009). Certain destinations have even become "viral" because of regular people and influencers posting about their travel experiences in these destinations and showcasing the destinations' beautiful landscapes, luxurious hotels, and interesting activities on social media (Akerhurst, 2009; Gurung & Goswami, 2016). According to Morais and Mhando (2012, as cited in Daif & Elsayed, 2019) virality has a direct link to destination selection.

Marketers can leverage UGC and encourage even more visitors to share their real experiences in the destination, which then can create even more aspiration in others to also visit the destination (Iglesias-Sánchez et al., 2020). Professional photoshoots with planned locations and poses and highly edited final products may create an aesthetic image of a destination, but UGC offers a more authentic perspective that is likely to resonate more with people (Gurung & Goswami, 2016). Content on social media also helps people create realistic expectations about the destinations (De Bruyn and Lilien, 2008) and might showcase places that perhaps the marketing team had not considered worth promoting or did not even know about previously. Tourism boards can cultivate galleries of genuine visitor moments with UGC and share perspectives about what the destination has to offer.

1.4 Tourism Destination Image

As mentioned previously, TDI is one of the most researched topics in the tourism field. There are numerous studies about how it is formed, what effects it has on future behavior and visit intention, and even how UGC impacts it. Former studies also provide TDIs for many destinations, based on text from various sources or photos on social medial, official promotional channels, magazines, and such, as end results from their studies (Deng et al., 2019; McCartney,

2008; Marine-Roig & Clavé, 2015; Stepchenkova et al., 2015; Stepchenkova & Zhan, 2013; Syafganti et al., 2022). However, even with all the research about TDI, there still are not many studies concerning how cultural groups might have different TDIs about the same destinations. This area of study about cultural differences in TDIs is necessary so that better understanding on how different target markets need to be addressed in tourism destination marketing can be realized. The previous literature on UGC and TDI that was available does suggest that people from different places have different TDIs (Deng et al., 2019; McCartney, 2008; Stepchenkova et al., 2015; Stepchenkova & Zhan, 2013) but comparisons between cultures were not found in abundance, especially in cases about specific destinations. It is therefore not possible to draw conclusions about how people from different background see destinations or how their travel interests differ. Furthermore, almost none of the previous literature has studied travel UGC on Instagram, as for example Deng et al. (2019) and Stepchenkova et al. (2015) both relied on Flickr. As a platform, Instagram is arguably one of the central aspects of our social media usage and many visit it tens of times daily and it is in fact used by 2 billion active users (Statista, 2023) in comparison to Flickr's 60 million users per month (Broz, 2022). As a consequence, it is a source that reflects the world population better than Flickr and could provide the accurate results about TDIs based on UGC and as such is important to study.

1.5 Research Objectives and Research Questions

The purpose of this research is to study whether there are differences in travel UGC posted on Instagram between the East and West and how these variations contribute to the creations of TDIs that are distinct from each other. Bangkok and Paris were selected as destinations due to their popularities according to visitor numbers and so that possible correlations of UGC posting behavior and cultural proximity to the destination can be explored. As one destination is located in the East and one in the West, they are each culturally more familiar with one of the demographic groups. By analyzing UGC posted on Instagram by people from two different cultural groups, the study can discover patterns and disparities in the types of content that is taken and shared by Asians and Westerners. For example, one group can be more interested in tourist attractions while the other one prefers sharing about local life, or one can be more interested in food while the other one focuses on photographing plants. These differences can create TDIs that are not completely in line with each other, although the destinations are the same. By being able to compare two different destinations, it is possible to assess whether a group is interested in the same things in both places or whether there is also difference in the UGC posted, depending on the destination in question. To bring all these considerations

together, two research questions for the study are formed: (1) Are there differences in travel UGC posted on Instagram between the East and West? and (2) Can potential variations contribute to the creations of distinct TDIs?

1.6 Relevance to the Industry

Finding out more about the differences of travel UGC between East and West, and what types of TDIs each groups possesses, can bring benefits to the tourism industry. When promoting a destination image, a marketer must know who they are promoting it to. Assuming that there indeed are differences between the TDIs of Eastern and Western people have, it is crucial that destination promoters create tailored content based on the target market. The lack of previous literature on the effects of cultural differences on TDI suggests that currently destination marketing cannot be targeted to a specific audience, at least not in most cases. This is also supported by the fact that most official Instagram accounts for tourism boards are for everyone and there are no targeted accounts for specific markets. As a result, marketing campaigns could inadvertently focus on totally irrelevant and unappealing aspects of a destination for one cultural group, while only highlighting things in accordance with the TDI another one has about the destination. By identifying cultural differences in travel UGC and TDIs, marketers can gain insights on how their destination is perceived around the world. This understanding could help them create more meaningful and engaging promotional campaigns and show that they understand the target demographic and their preferences. They can also get a better understanding on how to differentiate from the competing destinations.

Customized campaigns based on cultural differences can help destination promoters highlight the aspects of a destination that resonate the most with a specific cultural group. For example, if the analysis reveals that Asian travelers are particularly interested in local cuisine when traveling, marketing campaigns can focus on highlighting authentic culinary options, restaurants the local people frequent and food-related activities, such as cooking classes or visits to markets where people buy produce. On the other hand, if Westerners seem to be more interested in tourist attractions and cityscapes, campaigns can focus on the urban life, architecture and historical sites and highlight aspects of the destinations that make them stand out from the destinations near one's home country, like birds-eye views of grand cities with skyscrapers everywhere.

Since both cultural groups are compared in the case of two different cities, the study will be able to demonstrate whether a certain cultural group is interested in the same types of things wherever they travel or whether the cultural differences need to be regarded case by case. In

other words, if Asians are found to indeed share a lot of photos about food on Instagram, it does not necessarily mean that food is one of their biggest interests in all destinations. Perhaps they are interested in food more in Paris than Bangkok, since it is more interesting and different to the food they are used to eating at home. The opposite could be possible about Westerners. This is why it is important to study different destinations, not just one like previous research has done.

1.7 Structure of Dissertation

The research will start by doing a literature review and studying the relevant topics on UGC, TDIs, cultural differences and their connections in depth. It is important to know what is currently known about cultural differences in relation to UGC and TDI so that the gaps in research are clearly realized and relevant terms understood. The methodology used is pictorial analysis with manual content collection from Instagram hashtags representing two destinations, Bangkok and Paris. The collected photos are separated into groups based on whether they were posted by a person from Asian or Western country and whether they were taken in Bangkok or Paris. The content of the photos will be coded with 20 categories created by Stepchenkova and Zhan (2013) to study TDIs based on photos. After collection, the results are looked at and analysed to understand the potential differences in posting behaviour. Whether those differences lead into different TDIs of Bangkok and Paris based on cultural background or proximity will also be explored. In the last part, the findings will be concluded and the implications, limitations and suggestions for future research will be provided.

2. Literature Review

2.1 E-WOM

Social media and marketing cannot be separated anymore. The so-called Web 2.0, defined by Albăstroiu and Felea (2014) as services available via the internet that allow people to collaborate with each other in addition to sharing and exchanging information in a way that was not possible previously, has fully revolutionized how brands and consumers coexist and communicate. Nowadays the reputation and image of a product, service or experience is not solely based on the material a brand puts out and manages (Nisar et al., 2020). In other words, brand-related communication has changed from having only one direction into being a two-way stream. Social media has made it possible for consumers with no professional ties to a brand to share their opinions to a wide audience and influence how others might think of the good. This phenomenon is referred to as electronic word-of-mouth, or E-WOM. According to Litvin et al. (2008), E-WOM is all internet-based and informal communications that involve sharing about a product or service to other consumers. This definition is a reworking of Westbrook's (1987) definition of classical word-of-mouth, WOM, highlighting that the main difference between the two is the means through which the information is shared.

One of the fundamental criterions of the effectiveness of E-WOM is the credibility of the source. Mazzucchelli et al. (2018) found that recommendations from one's peer groups impacted not only trust but also brand loyalty. This is because individuals who share their opinions and experiences online generally have nothing to gain from creating a positive image of the product or service (Chatterjee, 2001). Put differently, there is no monetary incentive for them to lie about the product or exaggerate its characteristics. Peres and Silva (2021) state that credibility has direct effects on how useful the follower considers the information and how likely they are to adopt it in real life. Online reviews can even positively affect purchase intention (Liu et al., 2018). WOM, and E-WOM thereafter, are deemed to be the most important sources of information consumers consider when making purchase decisions nowadays (Litvin et al., 2008) and are only ever-increasing in importance for brands in all industries to utilize in their marketing efforts.

2.2 UGC and Social Media Influencers

Because of Web 2.0 and social media, users are now actively creating content that often passively influences people's purchase decisions and behaviors. E-WOM is closely linked with

the term user-generated content, UGC and its sister term CGC, consumer-generated content. This paper focuses specifically on the term UGC, which is defined by Christodoulides et al. (2012) as content that is freely accessible online, involves some sort of creativity and does not include professional affiliations. In a sense, it covers most personal content shared on social media by individuals with any size of following. In marketing context, UGC depicts or shares personal opinions or experiences about a product or service its users have had.

According to Ngyen and Tong (2022), UGC is an important tool to reduce the risks related to making purchase decisions, as people can assess the visual aspects of a product or service themselves. Moreover, people trust the information or impression about a destination more when it is shared by people who have personal experiences of visiting the place, rather than promotional materials from official sources (Ngyen & Tong, 2022). Yu and Ko (2019) state that traditional advertising is seen as less trustworthy than UGC. UGC can offer attainable inspiration to people making the destination and all its interesting characteristics feel like they are within the reach. People can easily picture themselves in the place of the person who posted the piece of content. People tend to naturally trust the UGC they see, as it feels like it is created without bias and is almost comparable to an experience a friend could share (Chatterjee, 2001). When deciding whether they can trust the source, Gurung and Goswami (2016) detail that people usually focus on accessibility, security, information-trust, interaction, and personalization. As the UGC people see on Instagram, for example, is in many cases posted by peers one knows in real life, it comes across as extremely trustworthy.

The UGC we consume is not, however, always created by people we know personally. E-WOM and UGC brough key opinion leaders, often referred to as influencers in the social media context, to the center stage. They are people who have gained some sort of authority over a topic and generally have won over the trust of their followers granting them a possibility to influence other people's opinions and purchasing decisions. A social media influencer is defined by Fredberg et al. (2011) as an "independent third-party endorser" who through social media platforms impacts their audience's attitudes. While many might think that bigger is better, there is a lot of research to prove that micro influencers generally have the best engagement rates and can influence their audience very effectively, making them very attractive for brands to collaborate with. Isyanto et al. (2020) divides influencers into three different categories: mega influencers with more than one million followers, macro influencers with more than 100,000 but less than a million followers and micro influencers with a range of 1,000 to 100,000 followers. A study regarding micro influencers and the hospitality field by Peres and Silva (2021) suggests that micro influencers do in fact have an important role in shaping the

purchase decision-making, stating that 79% of the respondents think that a micro influencer they follow influences their choices. Furthermore, interviews with micro influencers themselves reveal that their choice of hotel, for example, has an impact on their followers, in addition to the visual content and experiences they share paired with positive feedback (Peres & Silva, 2021).

While people might not know social media influencers personally, this phenomenon of influencers and influencer marketing brings parasocial relationships and their impact on social media marketing to the forefront. The concept is not new, although it has evolved because of social media. Horton and Wohl (1956, as cited in Reinikainen et al., 2020) define parasocial relationships as the experience one might have when they feel like they are interacting with a media performer through the screen or radio. Parasocial relationships create an illusion of a friendship-sort of relationship when in reality the interaction is of course one-way and does not even occur face-to-face physically. Nowadays parasocial relationships are especially relevant when talking about influencers and their audiences, as the importance of traditional media has decreased with the rise of social media. The imaginary friendship makes the perceiver feel like they know the influencer and can trust them, thus making their content extremely attractive and seemingly trustworthy to the follower (Reinikainen et al., 2019; Su et al., 2021). This means that when an influencer promotes or shares about a product or service or in the case of this paper, a travel destination, a follower is more likely not only to believe the influencer but also to want to purchase the product or travel to the same destination. Su et al. (2021) found that a person's purchase intention was increased, and perceived risk decreased when they thought the influencer was trustworthy because of parasocial relationship. This means that social media and UGC have great significances on marketing and purchase decisions and should be applied in all fields.

2.3 Tourism Industry and Social Media

The tourism and hospitality fields have been greatly affected by social media, as consumers have to do a lot of information search before making decisions. According to research done by Gurung and Goswami (2016), tourists have evolved to not only be consumers of marketing efforts done by destination promoters, but rather have become promoters themselves. Akerhurst (2009) mentions that people who post their own photos online are also usually the same people who tend to search for travel-related information on social media from other individuals sharing about their trips. Lo et al. (2011) characterize the type of person to post images on social media to be "younger, better educated, and earn a higher income than those who do not." Furthermore,

they state that 41% of people traveling purely for leisure post photos of their travels online (Lo et al., 2011). UGC is generally viewed as being without any bias and thus more trustworthy and credible than promotional materials from official sources (Gurung & Goswami, 2016), and therefore it is now largely in control of how a specific destination is seen. In short, destination marketers have very little say over what type of a destination image is created. They can only influence the image by offering positive experiences in the destination which in return leads to positive E-WOM and UGC that provides a desired image and more visitors in the future.

Even still, brands can utilize UGC for their own benefit. According to Akehurst (2009), the ever-increasing popularity of the internet has created challenges for various tourism organizations and companies, but they have also realized many new opportunities, such as created better ways of communication, better distribution channels and better transactions. Nonetheless, more than just a channel to relay information, UGC should be used as means to construct and uphold a positive destination image (Alcázar et al., 2014). Iglesias-Sánchez et al. (2020) found that Instagram as a visual platform has an effect on creating destination brands and showcasing destinations as being attractive and appealing, which then in return increases people's desires to visit such destinations. Furthermore, according to De Bruyn and Lilien (2008), reviews or posts online create real expectations regarding destinations, in addition to purely increasing or decreasing the fascination towards a it. These theories go hand in hand with the saying that a picture is worth a thousand words. However, not everybody uses UGC as an information source. A study by Simms (2012) stated that there were differences in the usage of UGC for travel planning depending on the type of trip and that people visiting a destination for the first time and travelling internationally tended to use UGC more.

Many tourism boards and other related tourism service providers have created a presence in social media and in many cases have gathered hundreds of thousands of followers. By resharing UGC, tourism marketers not only save a lot of budgets by not having to create content from scratch.. Merckel (2017, as cited in Mayrhofer et al., 2020) states that UGC is great news for brands as it is cheaper and more effective than traditional forms of advertising. Big accounts sharing UGC is a win-win situation as the brand gets free content and the original creator gets better reach for free by having their photo shared to a new, and in many cases, bigger audience. Meanwhile, a spectator, a follower, gets more exposure about the destination, which creates a new destination image or modifies the one they already have, and potentially grows their interest of visiting the place themselves (Gurung & Goswami, 2016; Alcázar et al., 2014; Iglesias-Sánchez et al., 2020). It has been stated that interactions on social media and co-creation improved one's image of the tourism destination (Yang, 2015). Even when a tourism

brand does not reshare travel UGC on their social media page, the very existence of travel UGC is already free marketing and increases awareness of the destination or tourism service. As stated previously, people are more likely to trust an "informal", friendly source than an official promotional material. This means that even the content that does not go further than one's profile feed can impact the destination images of the people who already follow them, no matter how small the follower count is. According to Sotiriadis and Van Zyl (2013, as cited in Rushton & Kennell, 2015), people sharing their travel experiences online during the trip itself is becoming increasingly common, and that behavior allows tourism service providers and destination organizations to gain access to consumption experiences and feedback in real-time. This information is extremely valuable for tourism enterprises and organizations and was not previously available. Alarcón-Urbistondo et al. (2021) state that the spontaneous nature of UGC is a good way to see what the most defining characteristics about each destination are.

2.4 Tourism Destination Image

Tourism destination image, or TDI, is one of the main research topics in tourism. There is no one universally accepted consensus on how to define it, however Crompton's (1979) definition of it being the summary of someone's "beliefs, ideas and impressions" about a tourism destination is one of the most referred to definitions and seems to be widely accepted and acknowledged. Building on Crompton's definition, Echtner and Ritchie (1993) propose that both symbolic and tangible qualities create a destination image and that it is multidimensional in nature. Symbolic aspects include the destination's image which is created from multiple sources of communication while tangle aspects refer to those of tangible nature, such as physical attributes of the destination. Kiyci and Aksoy (2011) add to the discourse that a positive TDI takes a lot of effort and time to develop and that it can be affected by many different factors. All of this suggests that TDI is shaped by a combination of internal and external aspects and can evolve through time.

Numerous sources contribute to shaping one's perception of a destination they have not even visited themselves. For example, movies, magazines, guidebooks, news, or personal experiences of one's closed ones are all factors that can affect the perception of a destination, in addition to social media posts (Gartner, 1994; Hahm, 2018). Nowadays there is no denying that the internet and social media play a significant role in influencing people's TDIs. Lam et al. (2020) state that one's TDI could be impacted by online content shared by someone while at the destination. This statement is further collaborated by Alcázar et al. (2014) and Li et al. (2022), whose studies support this notion and show that the information provided by UGC is

both cognitive and emotional and influences how a person views the destination, subsequently affecting their future behaviors in relation to visiting the destination. However, there are some varying opinions on the topic too. According to a study by Ngyen and Tong (2022), travel related UGC did not have a significant influence on the person's destination image, although it did have a positive correlation with intention to choose a specific travel destination. Due to the multitude of sources that contribute to the creation of TDI, it is challenging to determine which factors have impacted a person the most or which ones have not had any influence at all. It is also difficult to state which one is increasing their visiting intention the most. TDI formation in most cases is sub-conscious and in addition to being a result of many sources, also happens over-time and not at a specific moment. Even with these challenges in mind, the common understanding on the topic based on previous literature seems to be that UGC indeed does have an impact on TDI.

2.5 Cultural Differences

Culture impacts many aspects of one's behavior and being. Pizam et al. (1997, as cited in Li, 2012) describe culture as "values, beliefs, and norms" shared by a group of people that distinguishes them from other groups. Warner and Joynt (2002, as cited in Kastenholz, 2010) define culture as "collective programming of the mind", "collective soul" and a kind of a "social glue." Possibly the most famous theory about cultural differences is Hofstede's 1980 national cultural dimensions theory that compares countries based on different dimensions, such as individuality VS collectivism, power distance, masculinity VS femininity and indulgence. However, Hofstede's theory has been criticized in the recent years as not being accurate because the results are hard to generalize over the whole population of one country. There are other suggestions on how to better get an understanding of a country's cultural dimensions in contrast to other countries. Kim et al. (2010) approaches cultural differences by comparing holistic (view of everything from the universe, nature, and humans as a whole) and analytical (analyzing the whole to see what the key elements and the relationships between them are) worldviews. It was found that South-Koreans were more holistic than people from the United States and that that factor was more fundamental in explaining the cultural differences than individuality and collectivism, which had been proposed by Hofstede as one of the key cultural elements. Even when scholars disagree on which aspects of cultures should be compared to each other, which factors explain the culture's essence the most and can these things be generalized to define all members of the group, one thing is clear. Culture plays a significant role in how one experiences the world around them.

There are not many studies made about the relation of culture and TDI. However, the previous literature that does exist supports the notion that people from different geographical locations and cultures have different TDIs. A study by McCartney (2008) proves that the TDI of Macau is different between people from Shanghai, Beijing, Hong Kong, and Taiwan, even though culturally all five cities are relatively similar, in comparison with other regions in the world. This result is further corroborated by Deng et al. (2019) who found that the destination image of Shanghai was significantly different between tourists from East and West and by a study conducted by MacKay and Fesenmaier (2000) that shows that Taiwanese people and those from the US have different tastes in aesthetics leading to different results in evaluating and interpreting pictures of a tourism destination. These findings suggest that tourism marketers need to create campaigns targeted in the right way to the right customer base. One destination has many TDIs and therefore needs to take them into consideration and not only focus on couple of main factors of the destination. Furthermore, something shown in a promotional material can be interpreted very differently across cultures due to different symbolisms and experiences. Currently tourism organizations tend to only share one type of communication about a destination but the evidence suggesting that the materials should be more personalized and targeted to different cultures is clear.

Social media usage is also impacted by one's culture, which is one consideration to have when studying how UGC is different between East and West. Jackson and Wang (2013) suggest that Chinese people spent less time online than their US counterparts and considered social media less important. The findings were explained by Chinese people coming from a collective culture getting their social motives satisfied with interactions in real life rather than online. However, in contrast, a study done by Goodrich and De Mooij (2013) draws a link between collective cultures and the usage of social media to make purchase decisions. According to the study, social media played an important role in the opinion formation process for people from countries such as China, South Korea, and Thailand, in other words, countries classified by Hofstede as collective cultures, whereas Western countries that are individual reported less importance on social media in their purchase decisions. This could be explained by the fact that in collective cultures the opinions and behaviors of one's closed ones bears more importance than for those in more individualistic cultures. Since there are not many studies regarding cultural differences and social media behavior, it is hard to definitely state whether the differences can be explained with Hofstede's dimensions or some other cultural theory. All in all, it does seem that culture plays a role in one's social media behavior, but how, is the question that still is fairly unresearched.

UGC posted by Westerners and Easterners illustrate that the two cultures see destinations quite differently. An analysis of content on social media regarding Shanghai shows that while Western tourists were more interested in Shanghai's famous sights, architecture and the coexistence of modern and traditional cultures, Eastern tourists posted more about the locals, nature, and daily environment (Deng et al., 2019). These differences can be explained by different values these cultures have, but also by what type of content people from a certain culture likes to post on social media sites and how familiar they are with the destination in question. According to Nixon et al. (2016), people tended to form their TDI based on former experiences with the destination or secondary information. Moreover, they usually compared the attributes and likeliness of destinations with other destinations they were more familiar with. This is further supported by the findings in a previously referenced study by McCartney (2008) that state that people from Hong Kong had the strongest perception and image of Macau, resulting from the close proximity of the two regions. People from Hong Kong also were the most likely to characterize Macau as a restful and relaxing city, whereas people from Taiwan, Shanghai and Beijing saw it more as a destination for adult entertainment (McCartney, 2008). Similar results were realized by Kastenholz's (2010) study that wanted to find out whether cultural proximity led to a better destination image. In the case of North Portugal, cultural proximity did indeed have an impact on the TDI. People who were classified as "quite close" tourists had the best TDI in comparison with "distant" and "closest" tourists (Kastenholz, 2010). The fact that people the closest to the tourism destination did not have the very best TDI could be explained by the fact that people who travel are looking for some novelty in the destination, that is, they want to experience something new. These findings are further supported by a previous study by Richardson and Crompton (1988, as cited in Kastenholz, 2010) that found that when studying English and French speaking Canadians TDI of USA, cultural proximity turned out to be an even stronger indicator than differences in income or educational background.

3. Methodology

This study wanted to find out whether there were differences between the UGC people post about destinations on Instagram, based on their place of origin, and how that would result in different types of TDIs. In particular, people from Asian (including Russia and Turkey) and Western (Europe, North America, Australia and New Zealand) countries were the focus of the study. Pictorial studies are a common way to study destination image as it reflects how visitors perceive a destination and what factors of it, they consider significant. According to Jenkins (1999), the use of scales is problematic since the researcher designs them and thus some attributes important to the respondent might be missing or some insignificant ones might be included. Content analysis, including studying visual information, on the other hand can offer a lot of useful information about the TDI. Furthermore, UGC is a good way to assess what the essential characteristics of a destination are because it is not thoroughly planned and for that reason has a level of authenticity in it (Alarcón-Urbistondo et al., 2021).

In addition to studying differences in travel UGC posting behaviours between Asian and Western people, the study also wanted to find out whether those potential differences created different TDIs in different cultural groups. As previously suggested by McCartney (2008) and Kastenholz's (2010), cultural proximity is one of the factors to reflect how one perceives a destination. Hence one destination from Europe, Paris (in France), and one from Asia, Bangkok (in Thailand), were selected. According to Mastercard (2019), these two cities were the two most visited cities in the whole world in 2018 with 22.78 million and 19.10 million visitors respectively. There are multiple sources with different results to indicate the most visited cities in the world. Some measure all visitors, some only international visitors and some only overnight visitors. Mastercard measured international overnight visitors which most matches with the group this research wants to study. The statistic from this source were also used as they are referred to repeatedly by other articles discussing the most visited destinations and as a result the source has gained credibility in the matter. Moreover, the results by Mastercard reflect statistics on traveling before the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic changed the status quo. Results from the pandemic years, 2020-2022 and to some extent 2023, do not accurately reflect tourist destination selection as people are highly influenced by external sources, such as travel restrictions and fear of flights being cancelled.

The photos were taken from Instagram, which is the leading social media site for images with 2 billion active monthly users as of 2022 (Statista, 2023) and although there are not concrete statistics on how many photos are posted on the platform daily as different sources have variances in their numbers, Broz (2023) states the number to be 1.3 billion which seems

to be the most commonly referred number and at least gives an indication of what the amount is like in reality. Further reason to choose Instagram as a platform for this study is that it is used by "regular" people, not only photographers, which could be argued about other popular sites used in related research, such as Flickr. Flickr is not in everyday use of most people and is not often used to share one's personal experiences or to share information. Furthermore, in contrast to Flickr, Instagram is used worldwide and thus it was expected to provide well-rounded demographics and have users from several countries in each group. Previous research done by Stepchenkova et al. (2015) found that Koreans were only 1% of Flickr posters while Americans constituted to 25% which means that the site seems to be mostly used by Westerners and therefore cannot offer a comprehensive sample of people from various countries.

Many Instagram users post their travel photos to share them with their friends and family, but photos posted by public profiles (i.e., open for everybody to see in opposite to private profiles that require a person to ask for permission to see the content of) can appear on the discovery, location, and hashtag related pages for any user. They could therefore be used in this study. Unlike Flickr however, content had to be collected manually from Instagram as the site does not offer any databases.

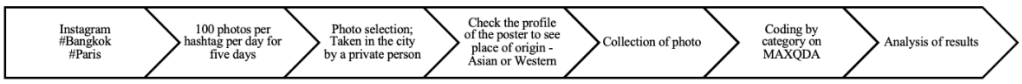


Figure 3.1

Sampling process (Source: own elaboration)

The sampling process is portrayed in the above formula (Figure 3.1). The process started with choosing the hashtags to select photos from and then collecting the right number of photos each day to reach the desired quota, 1000 photos. Only photos that fulfilled several criteria, stated in a following paragraph, were collected. After the daily quota of photos was reached, they were coded according to previously mentioned twenty categories on MAXQDA. At the end of the five days, a check-up was done to make sure the same logic was followed when coding all of the photos and so that they would be up to the same standard. Last step was to

combine the results and analyse the numbers. More detailed descriptions of each step are provided in the following paragraphs.

#Bangkok and #Paris were the two hashtags used to find the photos. There are no guarantees that a photo tagged with a certain hashtag is actually related to that place or topic which is why manual work and researcher's, who has visited both cities multiple times, judgement was crucial to ensure that the photos were actually taken in the cities under study. The photos were collected over the period of five days during week 14 in April 2023 with 200 photos, 100 from each city, being collected each day resulting in 1000 photos being collected by the end of the period. To identify where the poster was from, the researcher visited their Instagram profiles and read the information they had relied on their bio. If no indication about the person's origin was present, or they were not from Asian or Western countries, the photo was not collected. The photos were collected in order from the "most recent" section of the hashtag page so that they would be different each day and more likely to be posted by individuals than those that rank high on the "top posts" section.

Several criteria were posed to for the collected photos. First, as mentioned, they had to be taken in the city of question. As the hashtag can be used even when the photo is not actually taken in that place, this was done by identifying locations shown on the photos, reading photo descriptions, and by using judgement and knowledge about the destinations (neither is located next to the ocean, for example). If there was doubt whether a photo had been taken in the correct location, it was not included. Only photos posted by individuals about the destination for personal reasons were collected and photos promoting local businesses or products were excluded. Photos posted by photo resharing accounts were only included if they had tagged the original poster and they could be identified as Asian or Westerner. Repeat photos were only collected once. If a post included many photos in a so-called carousel, only the first photo was collected.

In the end, 500 photos from Bangkok and 500 photos from Paris were collected. Samples of the photos can be seen in Appendix A and Appendix B. The sample size was selected because it is similar to that of a similar study by Stepchenkova and Zhan (2013). Out of the total sample of 1000 photos in this study, 505 (50.5%) by people from Asian countries and 495 (49.5%) were posted by people from Western countries. In the case of the specific destinations, in both cases, there were more posters from the group physically closer to where the city is located. This is most likely due to the reason that people are more likely to visit cities in close proximity to their country of origin. As every photo that fulfilled the prementioned criteria was collected in order, the sizes of the cultural groups became uneven naturally. For the photos collected from

#Bangkok, 324 (64.8%) were posted by Asians and 176 (35.2%) by Westerners, whereas from #Paris, 181 (36.2%) of the photos had been taken by Asians and 319 (63.8%) were by Westerners. Although the amounts were not equal, the proportions of the groups remained almost the same. Moreover, in the total amount there were only a 1.0 percentage points variance in the amounts.

After the collection and poster origin identification, the photos were classified on MAXQDA to 20 different categories developed by Stepchenkova and Zhan in their 2013 study. The categories were "Architecture/Buildings", "Archaeological site", "Art Object", "Country Landscape", "Domesticated Animals", "Festivals & Rituals", "Food", "Leisure Activities", "Nature & Landscape", "Other", "Outdoor/Adventure", "People", "Plants", "Tour", "Tourism Facilities", "Traditional Clothing", "Transport/Infrastructure", "Urban Landscape", "Way of Life" and "Wild Life". Each photo could be coded with many different categories based on what was or were the main focus of the photo, but the maximum number of codes any single photo ended up having is four. These categories by Stepchenkova and Zhan (2013), or adaptations of them, are widely used in pictorial destination image studies about UGC, such as in Stepchenkova et al. (2015), Kuhzady et al. (2017) and Syafganti et al. (2022) and include various aspects of a destination making them a good classification system for this study as well. The categories were originally developed in relation to the whole country of Peru, whereas in this study both destinations are urban cities, which is one of the reasons why in the end three of them were not applicable to any collected photo. "Country Landscape", "Outdoor/Adventure" and "Tour" categories were never used in either city by either of the groups. Furthermore, "Archaeological site" was changed into "Historical & Religious Sites", as that was more fitting to the cities in question since they generally do not have archaeological sites. It is also worth noting that no official descriptions what each category entailed was provided, so the researcher had to use her own judgment to interpret them and code the photos accordingly. Hence, some applications of the categories could be different than intended in the original study. A guideline of sorts was in place however for this study, so that there would be consistency in the coding.

Some of the categories were subdivided into more detailed categories to realize differences more clearly. These subcategories were created based on what the findings were. In other words, which categories had clear trends of what was posted in relation to them and so for which subcategories there was a need. The subcategories therefore are not the same as in the Stepchenkova and Zhan (2013) study. "People" category was divided into "Single", "Couple", "Three to Five" and "Crowd" to indicate how many people were photographed and "Tourism Facilities" was divided into "Airport", "Amusement Park", "Bar" and "Restaurant & Street

Food" as those were the repeating places. In addition, both cities got their own categories to see what specific attractions were most photographed. In the case of Bangkok, these subgroups were put under "Historical & Religious Sites", and they included three of the most photographed attractions, "Grand Palace", "Wat Arun" and "Wat Pho", also known as Reclining Buddha. For Paris, the subgroups are under "Architecture/Buildings", and they are "Arc de Triomphe", "Eiffel Tower", "Louvre Museum" and "Musée d'Orsay". There was also a subcategory "Regular Buildings" as that turned out to be one of the more popular objects to photograph in Paris.

The reason for why tourist attractions were categorized differently in each city is because there was no category created for tourist attractions and the attractions in each city did not fit under the same category. In Bangkok not only do the sites in many cases have longer histories than those of Paris, but they were also closely related to the local major religion, Buddhism, or the Royal Family which has a long history and is considered a key part of the Thai identity. In Paris the attractions seemed to be mostly photographed for their architecture, which was evident for example by the fact that most photos from Louvre Museum included the glass pyramids located outside the museum, built in 1987, and not the interior of the museum itself. Furthermore, the attractions were usually buildings or structures, whereas in Bangkok the Grand Palace for example is a big complex of buildings, temples, and statues among other things, including historical art and artifacts. Even though the attractions were categorized under different codes, it does not mean that in Bangkok only "Historical & Religious Sites" and in Paris only "Architecture/Buildings" were seen. In both cities, the other category was also present as there were other objects that were photographed that fit in them. There were photographs highlighting architecture or specific buildings in Bangkok and historical and/or religious places, such as churches, photographed in Paris.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Results

This study set to find out how travel UGC posted by Asians and Westerners on Instagram differ from each other and how that could result in different types of TDIs. These questions were studied in the cases of two specific cities, Bangkok and Paris. This was done so that the results could be analysed more easily and differences between the demographic groups could be studied in relation to the cultural closeness of the destination to their country of origin. Additionally, the results could show whether the groups behaved differently in none, one or two of the cities and whether the destination or cultural proximity affected posting behaviour more.

The findings were divided into three different sections. The "All" section includes results from both cities, as depicted in Table 4.1, while "Bangkok" (Table 4.2) and "Paris" (Table 4.3) sections show findings from the specific cities more in detail. Each collected Instagram photo was coded with as many categories developed by Stepchenkova and Zhan (2013) as necessary based on what was depicted. This means that the total combined amount of the percentages of do not equal to one hundred, which is important to note. Instead, the percentages show how many percentages of the photos had at least that category present in it. For example, people rarely were standing in front of blank walls but would pose in their holiday photos in front of various attractions or showcase different experiences they had had. These types of photos would therefore get categorized with at least two categories, one indicating that a person was present and one to describe what was in the background, such as an attraction or a tourism facility.

4.1.1 Both Destinations

ALL	Asian (505)		Western (495)		All (1000)	
Categories	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
Architecture/Buildings	135	26.7%	172	34.7%	307	30.7%
Art Object	38	7.5%	47	9.5%	85	8.5%
Country Landscape	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
Domesticated Animals	8	1.6%	7	1.4%	15	1.5%
Festivals & Rituals	3	0.6%	2	0.4%	5	0.5%
Food	82	16.2%	43	8.7%	125	12.5%
Histrorical & Religious Sites	69	13.7%	59	11.9%	128	12.8%
Leisure Activities	8	1.6%	13	2.6%	21	2.1%
Nature & Landscape	14	2.8%	13	2.6%	27	2.7%
Other	10	2.0%	15	3.0%	25	2.5%
Outdoor/Adventure	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
People	282	55.8%	268	54.1%	550	55.0%
Single	*207*	*41.0%*	*171*	*34.5%*	*378*	*37.8%*
Couple	*40*	*7.9%*	*37*	*7.5%*	*77*	*7.7%*
Three to Five	*15*	*3.0%*	*30*	*6.1%*	*45*	*4.5%*
Crowd	*20*	*4.0%*	*30*	*6.1%*	*50*	*5.0%*
Plants	26	5.1%	34	6.9%	60	6.0%
Tour	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
Tourism Facilities	92	18.2%	59	11.9%	151	15.1%
Airport	*4*	*0.8%*	*1*	*0.2%*	*5*	*0.5%*
Amusement Park	*5*	*1.0%*	*7*	*1.4%*	*12*	*1.2%*
Bar	*10*	*2.0%*	*7*	*1.4%*	*17*	*1.7%*
Hotel	*24*	*4.8%*	*10*	*2.0%*	*34*	*3.4%*
Restaurant & Street Food	*46*	*9.1%*	*34*	*6.9%*	*80*	*8.0%*
Other	*3*	*0.6%*	*0*	*0.0%*	*3*	*0.3%*
Traditional Clothing	15	3.0%	4	0.8%	19	1.9%
Transport/Infrastructure	35	6.9%	19	3.8%	54	5.4%
Urban Landscape	52	10.3%	72	14.5%	124	12.4%
Way of Life	15	3.0%	25	5.1%	40	4.0%
Wild Life	2	0.4%	4	0.8%	6	0.6%

Table 4.1

Frequencies and percentages of categories, both destinations (Source: own elaboration).

In order from most frequent to least frequent, the top ten categories for both of the groups are: “People” (55.0%), “Architecture/Buildings” (30.7%), “Tourism Facilities” (15.1%), “Historical & Religious Sites” (12.8%), “Food” (12.5%), “Urban Landscape” (12.4%), “Art Object” (8.5%), “Plants” (6.0%), “Transportation/Infrastructure” (5.4%) and “Way of life” (4.0%). The five least posted about categories on the other hand were “Festivals & Rituals” (0.5%), “Wild Life” (0.6%), “Domesticate Animals” (1.5%), “Traditional Clothing” (1.9%) and “Leisure Activities” (2.1%). In addition to these, there were three categories that never got posted about: “Country Landscape”, “Outdoor/Adventure” and “Tour”.

Looking at Asians and Westerners separately, there were some differences in the rankings of the categories, as well as the portions the categories were. However, the two top categories were the same for both groups. Those categories were “People” with 55.8% for Asians and 54.1% for Westerners and “Architecture/Buildings” with 26.7% and 34.7% for Asians and Westerners, respectively. In the subcategories of “People”, “Single” was the clearly most popular subcategory in all the cases. Other subcategories each constituted to less than 10.0% of the photos for both groups in both cities. For Asians photographing “Three to Five” or “Crowd” subcategories were even rarer than for Westerners. “Three to Five” appeared only in 3.0% and “Crowd” in 4.0% of Asians’ photos while both subcategories were in 6.1% of Westerners’ photos.

For Asians, the following leading categories were “Tourism Facilities” (18.2%), “Food” (16.2%) and “Historical & Religious Sites” (13.7%). For Westerners on the other hand, “Urban Landscape” (14.5%) is the third biggest category followed by “Historical & Religious Sites” (11.9%) and “Tourism Facilities” (11.9%). The five most frequently photographed topics were almost the same for the two groups. The key differences in rankings had to do with “Food” that was the fourth most popular category and present in 16.2% of Asians photos and only seventh with 8.7% for Westerners. Another difference was with “Urban Landscape” that was in the sixth place for Asians with 10.3% of the photos while for Westerners it was the third most common category and was in 14.6% of their photos.

Regarding subcategories about tourism facilities, both groups photographed “Restaurant and Street Food” the most with 9.1% for Asians and 6.9% for Westerners, followed by “Hotel” with 4.8% and 2.0%, “Bar” with 2.0% and 1.4%, “Amusement Park” with 1.0% and 1.4% and “Airport” with 0.8% and 0.2% for Asians and Westerners respectively. In all cases besides “Amusement Park”, Asians posted more photos about the subcategory. The difference was the clearest with “Hotel”.

Main categories in which Asians and Westerners had the biggest differences by percentage points were “Architecture/Buildings” with Westerners photographing it 8.0 percentage points more, “Food” that Asians photographed 7.5 percentage points more and “Tourism Facilities” that Asians once again photographed more by 6.3 percentage points. However, when looking at differences by proportion, “Traditional Clothing” has the biggest difference. It was in 3.0% of Asians’ photos and only 0.8% of Westerners’ photos meaning that Asians posted about it nearly 3.8 times more often.

4.1.2 Bangkok

BANGKOK	Asian (324)		Western (176)		All (500)	
Categories	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
Architecture/Buildings	28	8.6%	15	8.5%	43	8.6%
Art Object	16	4.9%	3	1.7%	19	3.8%
Country Landscape	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
Domesticated Animals	6	1.9%	1	0.6%	7	1.4%
Festivals & Rituals	3	0.9%	1	0.6%	4	0.8%
Food	61	18.8%	18	10.2%	79	15.8%
Histrorical & Religious Sites	64	19.8%	45	25.6%	109	21.8%
Grand Palace	*12*	*3.7%*	*11*	*6.3%*	*23*	*4.6%*
Wat Arun	*27*	*8.3%*	*12*	*6.8%*	*39*	*7.8%*
Wat Pho	*4*	*1.2%*	*3*	*1.7%*	*7*	*1.4%*
Other	*21*	*6.5%*	*19*	*10.8%*	*40*	*8.0%*
Leisure Activities	7	2.2%	4	2.3%	11	2.2%
Nature & Landscape	10	3.1%	10	5.7%	20	4.0%
Other	8	2.5%	7	4.0%	15	3.0%
Outdoor/Adventure	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
People	193	59.6%	92	52.3%	285	57.0%
Single	*142*	*43.8%*	*65*	*36.9%*	*207*	*41.4%*
Couple	*28*	*8.6%*	*11*	*6.3%*	*39*	*7.8%*
Three to Five	*11*	*3.4%*	*10*	*5.7%*	*21*	*4.2%*
Crowd	*12*	*3.7%*	*6*	*3.4%*	*18*	*3.6%*
Plants	15	4.6%	12	6.8%	27	5.4%
Tour	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
Tourism Facilities	70	21.6%	30	17.0%	100	20.0%
Airport	*4*	*1.2%*	*0*	*0.0%*	*4*	*0.8%*
Amusement Park	*2*	*0.6%*	*0*	*0.0%*	*2*	*0.4%*
Bar	*10*	*3.1%*	*5*	*2.8%*	*15*	*3.0%*
Hotel	*24*	*7.4%*	*10*	*5.7%*	*34*	*6.8%*
Restaurant & Street Food	*28*	*8.6%*	*15*	*8.5%*	*43*	*8.6%*
Other	*2*	*0.6%*	*0*	*0.0%*	*2*	*0.4%*
Traditional Clothing	15	4.6%	3	1.7%	18	3.6%
Transport/Infrastructure	27	8.3%	15	8.5%	42	8.4%
Urban Landscape	49	15.1%	50	28.4%	99	19.8%
Way of Life	13	4.0%	6	3.4%	19	3.8%
Wild Life	2	0.6%	2	1.1%	4	0.8%

Table 4.2

Frequencies and percentages of categories, Bangkok (Source: own elaboration).

In Table 4.2, The posting behavior of Asians and Westerners was studied in the case of Bangkok. For Asians, the clearly biggest category remained “People” with 59.6% of the photos having at least that coding. This was followed by “Tourism Facilities” (21.6%), “Historical & Religious Sites” (19.8%), “Food” (18.8%) and “Urban Landscape” (15.1%). For Westerners the biggest category was also “People” with 52.3%, which is slightly lower than for Asians. The next biggest categories were “Urban Landscape” (28.4%), “Historical & Religious Sites” (25.6%), “Tourism Facilities” (17.0%) and “Food” (10.2%).

For both, the top five most photographed categories were the same, however, the proportions varied significantly. For example, “Urban Landscape” was posted about by Westerners 13.3 percentage points more often than by Asians, which is almost double the amount, while “Food” was present in photos by Asians 8.6 percent points more, an amount which also was almost twice the amount than that of the other group. The categories that were the least popular to photograph were “Wild Life”, “Festivals & Rituals” and “Domesticated Animals” for both groups with only, on average, 0.8%, 0.8% and 1.4% photos depicting them, respectively.

The most visited touristic sites are worth taking a closer look at. The subcategories of “Historical & Religious Sites” reveals about Asians’ and Westerners’ difference regarding attractions in Bangkok. The clearly most popular attraction for Asians was Wat Arun with 8.3% of all photos depicting it, followed by Grand Palace with 3.7%. For Westerners, the two most common sites to post about had almost the same percentages as Wat Arun had 6.8% and Grand Palace 6.3%. This shows that Asians clearly preferred one attraction more while Westerners did not have such a trend. Wat Pho only appeared on average in 1.4% on the photos of both groups. 6.5% and 10.8% of the photos showed other, less frequently portrayed attractions by Asians and Westerners respectively.

Some differences can also be realized when studying the “Tourism Facilities” category. For both the biggest subcategories were “Restaurant & Street Food” with 8.6% for Asians and 8.5% for Westerners and “Hotel” with 7.4% for Asians and 5.7% for Westerners. While Asians also posted, although in small amount, about the Suvarnabhumi Airport and a place that seeming like an amusement park, Westerners did not. Other differences were also present. While “Art Object” was not particularly popular topic of photography in Bangkok for either group, Asians depicted it in 4.9% of their photos while Westerners only in 1.7% which is almost three times less. Another similar result can be seen regarding “Traditional Clothing”. It was in 4.6% of Asians’ photos and only in 1.7% of Westerners’ photos. Once again, the frequency of posting about the topic was almost three-fold by Asians. This indicates clear differences in interests.

4.1.3 Paris

PARIS	Asian (181)		Western (319)		All (500)	
Categories	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
Architecture/Buildings	107	59.1%	157	49.2%	264	52.8%
Arc de Triomphe	*1*	*0.6%*	*10*	*3.1%*	*11*	*2.2%*
Eiffel Tower	*46*	*25.4%*	*46*	*14.4%*	*92*	*18.4%*
Louvre Museum	*12*	*6.6%*	*10*	*3.1%*	*22*	*4.4%*
Musée d'Orsay	*1*	*0.6%*	*7*	*2.2%*	*8*	*1.6%*
Regular Building	*26*	*14.4%*	*69*	*21.6%*	*95*	*19.0%*
Other	*21*	*11.6%*	*15*	*4.7%*	*36*	*7.2%*
Art Object	22	12.2%	44	13.8%	66	13.2%
Country Landscape	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
Domesticated Animals	2	1.1%	6	1.9%	8	1.6%
Festivals & Rituals	0	0.0%	1	0.3%	1	0.2%
Food	21	11.6%	25	7.8%	46	9.2%
Histrorical & Religious Sites	5	2.8%	14	4.4%	19	3.8%
Leisure Activities	1	0.6%	9	2.8%	10	2.0%
Nature & Landscape	4	2.2%	3	0.9%	7	1.4%
Other	2	1.1%	8	2.5%	10	2.0%
Outdoor/Adventure	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
People	89	49.2%	176	55.2%	265	53.0%
Single	*65*	*35.9%*	*106*	*33.2%*	*171*	*34.2%*
Couple	*12*	*6.6%*	*26*	*8.2%*	*38*	*7.6%*
Three to Five	*4*	*2.2%*	*20*	*6.3%*	*24*	*4.8%*
Crowd	*8*	*4.4%*	*24*	*7.5%*	*32*	*6.4%*
Plants	11	6.1%	22	6.9%	33	6.6%
Tour	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
Tourism Facilities	22	12.2%	29	9.1%	51	10.2%
Airport	*0*	*0.0%*	*1*	*0.3%*	*1*	*0.2%*
Amusement Park	*3*	*1.7%*	*7*	*2.2%*	*10*	*2.0%*
Bar	*0*	*0.0%*	*2*	*0.6%*	*2*	*0.4%*
Hotel	*0*	*0.0%*	*0*	*0.0%*	*0*	*0.0%*
Restaurant & Street Food	*18*	*9.9%*	*19*	*6.0%*	*37*	*7.4%*
Other	*1*	*0.6%*	*0*	*0.0%*	*1*	*0.2%*
Traditional Clothing	0	0.0%	1	0.3%	1	0.2%
Transport/Infrastructure	8	4.4%	4	1.3%	12	2.4%
Urban Landscape	3	1.7%	22	6.9%	25	5.0%
Way of Life	2	1.1%	19	6.0%	21	4.2%
Wild Life	0	0.0%	2	0.6%	2	0.4%

Table 4.3

Frequencies and percentages of categories, Paris (Source: own elaboration).

The posting behavior from Paris was depicted in Table 4.3. The five biggest categories, once again, are the same for Asians and Westerners but there are differences in the proportions and Asians in Paris were the only group who posted more about another category than “People”. That category was “Architecture/Buildings”, and it was coded in 59.1% of the photos. It was thereafter followed by “People” with 49.2%, almost ten percentage points lower. The next three categories were “Tourism Facilities” (12.2%), “Art Object” (12.2%) and “Food” (11.6%). For

Westerners the biggest categories in order were “People” (55.2%), “Architecture/Buildings” (49.2%), “Art Object” (13.8%), “Tourism Facilities” (9.1%) and “Food” (7.8%).

In the case of Paris, there were two categories, besides the three that never appeared in either of the cities for either of the groups, that were not photographed by Asians at all, while they were still photographed by Westerners. Those categories were “Traditional Clothing” and “Wild Life”. Furthermore, “Hotel”, a subcategory of “Tourism Facilities”, was not included in the photos of Paris by neither of the groups while “Airport” and “Bar” were not photographed by Asians at all but were once again photographed by Westerners, although in small amounts.

A look into “Architecture/Buildings” shows which group photographed which attractions more in Paris. For Asians there is one place that was clearly the most popular – the Eiffel Tower. It was present in 25.4% of all the photos Asians posted from Paris and 11.0 percentage points more common than the second most popular object, regular buildings. That subcategory includes photos of buildings that are not attractions and seemed to be commemorated just for their architectural designs or simply to show what normal Parisian buildings look like. Asians photographed these types of buildings in 14.4% of their photos. Arc de Triomphe and Musée d’Orsay were both only posted by one person and thus were only 0.6% of the photos. Westerners also focused on the same buildings the most. However, for them “Regular Building” was the most popular category with 21.6% followed by “Eiffel Tower” with a fairly low percentage of 14.4%, for such an iconic building. Although in small amounts, Westerners also photographed other famous attractions in Paris more. Those were “Arc de Triomphe” and “Louvre Museum” both with 3.1% and “Musée d’Orsay” with 2.2%. In Musée d’Orsay the most popular spot to photograph was a big clock which was the focus of the photo in almost all of the photos posted from the museum. Art pieces of the museum were less frequent and barely photographed at all.

Some clear differences in the posting behaviors in Paris were as follows. “Food” was an object of photography with 11.6% for Asians and 7.8% for Westerners while “Leisure Activities” was only photographed in 0.6% of Asians’ and 2.8% of Westerners’ photos. Similarly, “Transportation/Infrastructure” was photographed differently as for Asians it had 4.4% and for Westerners 1.3% which means it was 3.4 times more popular in the photos by Asians. The greatest proportional differences were present in “Urban Landscape” and “Way of Life” that were nearly not photographed by Asians at all. The former was 4.1 times more commonly present in the photos taken by Westerners and “Way of Life”, photos depicting normal, non-posed everyday life of the, seemingly, locals, was photographed 5.5 times more by Westerners than Asians. The difference is the greatest proportional difference of all categories in both cities.

4.2 Discussion

As both Bangkok and Paris are big, landlocked metropolitan cities, the results could be looked at side by side and mirrored to each other to some extent. As example, in theory, Asians visiting Bangkok should post an equivalent number of photos about the same topics as they do from Paris, such as tourist attractions, urban landscape, food or tourism facilities. However, this was not what was evident in many cases. I addition to comparing the cultural groups with themselves, the following paragraphs will also discuss the similarities, and differences between the two groups, and the reasons for those are speculated on.

Even though both Asians and Westerners had the same ten most frequent categories when their results from both cities were combined, the categories' rankings and proportions in the sample varied and when looking at the cities separately, more differences became evident. The results indicate that a destination itself affected posting behavior more than the cultural group of the poster. Asians and Westerners had more differences with themselves in different destinations, than with each other in the same destination. To rephrase, Asians were more alike with Westerners when the destination was the same, than with themselves when the destination was different. The same was true for Westerners. Nevertheless, the cultural groups did also have some characteristic posting behaviors that differed from the other group. They seemingly placed importance on different things when traveling and the most notable distinctions will be discussed in the following paragraphs.

4.2.1 People

Overall, "People" was the most popular category by a large margin. Both Asians and Westerners showed people in more than half of the photos and it was the most frequent category in all cases, except for Asians in Paris. Asians had a noticeable higher percentage for "People" in Bangkok than in Paris, while for Westerner people the percentages were almost the same, although slightly higher in Paris. These findings are not in line with previous literature. Both Deng et al. (2019) and Stepchenkova et al. (2015) studies found that Asians posted about people significantly more than the Westerns, whereas in this study, all in all, "People" was almost equally frequent in both groups' photos. An additional finding made possible by the comparison of not only two cultural groups but also two destinations was that each group photographed "People" more in the destination they were culturally closer to. There could be multiple reasons for that. For example, cultural proximity could influence people so that when they visit a destination that is closer to their own place of origin, they feel a stronger connection with the local people or feel more comfortable being in front of the camera themselves.

It is not unexpected that “People” was the most popular category overall, since Instagram is all about posting photos of oneself. Therefore, it is not really a behavior brought out by these destinations but more result of the function and usage of Instagram as an app. Neither destination was portrayed as a family destination nor a couple’s destination based on the people exhibited in the photos, however, showing photos of single people does not indicate that people were traveling solo either. The behavior could be simply because people either did not want to show their private life, like who they were traveling with, or that they only post photos of themselves on their Instagram feeds which is very common and a characteristic of the app. For those reasons conclusions about the frequencies of posting “People” in relation to Bangkok and Paris cannot really be made.

There were some notable photographic differences when showing “People”, however. Selfies were quite uncommon for Asians and over half of their photos that included a person seemed like thought had gone into the framing and posing choice of the object. Put differently, the photos appeared planned and not taken quickly in the moment. The contrary was true for Westerners. Over half of their photos seemed like they were candid or that they were not specifically posed for and instead appeared more like casual memories of a specific moment or feeling. Westerners took more selfies than Asians, although a majority of their photos were also taken by someone else.

4.2.2 Tourist Attractions

When looking at the behavior in photographing tourist attractions, there were clear differences between the two groups and the two cities. As mentioned in the Methodology chapter, tourist attractions were coded under different categories for the cities. In Bangkok they were coded as “Historical & Religious Sites” whereas in Paris as “Architecture/Buildings”. For clarity’s sake, from here on out, tourist attractions are referred to as such, tourist attractions. The results included in them have been taken from the relevant category of each city.

All in all, Asians and Westerners photographed tourist attractions in almost equal amounts, but for Asians the difference between cities was evident. In Bangkok they posted about attractions less than half the amount than in Paris. For Westerners the amounts were almost the same in both cities. In both Bangkok and Paris, the group that was further from their country of origin posted more photos about tourist attractions than the group closer in proximity. This could be due to the reason that they find the attractions more spectacular or that the group closer in proximity has people who are not visiting the destination for the first time and could therefore be focusing on other aspects of it. Another reason could be that since there is generally less

information available about faraway destinations, the information that reaches people and becomes an important aspect of their TDIs, are the famous tourist attractions.

In the case of Bangkok, the Grand Palace and Wat Arun were the most popular attractions to post about by both groups. However, with Asians there is a clear distinction that Wat Arun was the most popular one to photograph. Westerners meanwhile posted about the two roughly as often. The difference could be due to the relatively high-ticket price for the Grand Palace. Western people have already traveled a long way and might see Bangkok as a once-in-a-lifetime destination, so a 15€ entrance ticket does not seem like much for them. One reason might also be the fact that Asians just find the traditional Wat Arun more photogenic and special than the Grand Palace that is whereas Westerners see them as equally remarkable.

In Paris there were some noteworthy differences between the groups and the attractions they posted about. The Eiffel Tower appeared as the main focus in every fourth photo by Asians making it not only the clearly most popular tourist attraction for them but also a single most popular object to photograph, after "People". Westerners on the other hand seemed to not be very interested in the Eiffel Tower, which is surprising since it is such an iconic landmark and a symbol of Paris. It could be that Westerners feel that showing the Eiffel Tower is "too on the nose" for Paris photos or simply do not think it is the most interesting thing in the city. This is supported by the fact that "Regular building" was more common for Westerners to post about than any attraction. Stepchenkova et al. (2015) also found that Western people in the sample posted more about regular buildings than their Asian counterparts. This finding is further reinforced by Deng et al. (2019) who discovered that Westerners posted about architecture more than Asians.

The finding about Paris, that Westerners in the sample were more interested in photographing regular buildings than any tourist attractions, goes hand in hand with Westerners also preferring to photograph "Way of Life" more than Asians. It is possible that Westerners want to show Paris as it is, not as a romanticized destination that we often see in movies and such. Westerners overall portrayed a more diverse image of Paris as they also were more likely to show other tourist attractions. Asians in contrary very rarely posted about any other attractions besides the Eiffel Tower and Louvre Museum. It is quite unexpected that Arc de Triomphe was so rare to see in the photos posted by Asians, even though it is a famous landmark in Paris. Maybe it is not something people from Asia find particularly interesting or beautiful or perhaps it is not that famous in Asian countries. It is also worth noting that both groups posted about the Louvre Museum's glass pyramids, that are located outside in a square and

accessible without a charge, more than about the actual art inside the museum, which includes the world-famous Mona Lisa.

A clear distinction between the groups and their behavior on photographing tourist attractions was that Asians had one clearly most popular attraction in both cities, while for Westerners there was more variety. If Hofstede's 1980 theory about cultures is to be believed, this could be explained by Asian countries' collective cultures. They are more likely to follow what their peers have previously done and more individualistic Westerners on the other hand could be more likely to go to sites they find interesting, not what is deemed "acceptable" for the destination.

4.2.3 Tourism Facilities

"Tourism Facilities" was more popular category among Asians than Westerners but for both groups it was more popular to post about in Bangkok than in Paris. Almost double the number of photos about "Tourism Facilities" were posted there. Even the subcategories follow the same trend and many of them were completely or almost ignored by both Asians and Westerners in Paris. The only subcategory of that was more popular in Paris than in Bangkok for both groups was "Amusement Park". It is only logical since Disneyland Paris is a popular activity to do around Paris while Bangkok does not have anything similar to offer. Indeed, all photos coded "Amusement Park" in Paris were taken in Disneyland Paris. In addition to "Amusement Park", Asians also photographed "Restaurant & Street Food" slightly more in Paris than in Bangkok. "Restaurant & Street Food" was the clearly most posted about tourism facility in Paris for both of the groups and it is no surprise since Paris is seen as home to many world-renowned restaurants. However, it is worth noting that all in all "Restaurant & Street Food" and "Food" were still more common to post about in Bangkok by Asians as well as Westerners. This indicates that neither of the groups saw culinary aspects as Paris' main offerings.

"Bar" is way more popular subcategory to post about in Bangkok than in Paris, where it was completely skipped over by Asians and only appears in two of Westerners' photos. Surely, in Bangkok there are many breathtaking and trendy rooftop bars that overlook the metropolitan from heights as high as the 60th or even 78th floor, which are hard to compete with, but the complete lack of bars at all in the photos of Asians in Paris is unexpected. Differences in prices are not the answer either since cocktails in Bangkok's skybars match the prices of Paris very closely. In Bangkok, and Asia in general, bars are made to look very photogenic and sometimes even offer specific spaces where photo taking has been one of the main considerations in the design, which could encourage photo taking. Paris' bars, while nicely decorated, might not offer

equally good facilities for Instagram photos, or have an atmosphere where photo taking in bars is not as accepted. It could also be possible that the lack of bar photos is due to Paris just not being seen as a destination where to party or enjoy a cocktail. Bangkok on the other hand is quite party capital and attracts many young people.

In the results it is clear to see that in Paris people did not showcase their hotels as no Asians nor Westerners in the sample posted anything about their accommodations. As Paris is a more expensive destination than Bangkok, it could be that people mostly stay in the cheapest accommodation they could find and do not want to show that on social media. Although there are examples of extravagant Paris hotel stays in Instagram, it is only true for a small portion of the population that can afford those types of accommodations. In Bangkok, people are able to stay in places that in comparison provide more value for less money and have a luxury aspect to them. For example, views overlooking the city, big swimming pools and hotel gardens. In fact, for both groups, hotel pools were the most popular thing in the facility to post about indicating that the luxury aspect could indeed be a factor.

Why "Tourism Facilities" were so clearly more popular topic to photograph in Bangkok than in Paris could be theorized to be due to two different reasons. Either Bangkok offers a bigger and better variety of tourism facilities that attract people, or they are deemed to be more "Instagrammable" than in Paris.

4.2.4 Urban Landscape

The disparity of Asians and Westerners posting photos of "Urban Landscape" in the two destinations might shed light on the groups' perceptions and experiences in these cities. Westerners posted significantly more photos about it in Bangkok and Paris than their Asian counterparts. Even still, both groups posted more "Urban Landscape" photos in Bangkok than in Paris. In fact, Asians very rarely photographed the topic in Paris at all. This is a considerable difference for Asians between the two destinations and could suggest that they do not perceive Paris as an urban metropolis on the same scale as the cities they are used to in their own countries. In general cities in Asia are a lot bigger in size and in population than cities in Western countries, which is an important fact to note and could consequently lead to them focus less on the "Urban Landscape" aspect when photographing Paris.

Similarly, Westerners also had a considerable difference between the cities and "Urban Landscape". In Bangkok it was their second most common category, which is a big difference to Asians and to themselves in Paris, although they still did post "Urban Landscape" photos there too. It seems that in Bangkok what really stood out to them was its grandness. "Urban

Landscape" was more popular category for Westerners in Bangkok than tourist attractions, which really highlights the importance of it.

4.2.5 Effects of Cultural Proximity

Comparing the photographic behaviors in both cities by both groups, there are some trends that emerge based on cultural proximity to the destination. In addition to the previously mentioned facts that "People" were photographed slightly more in the destination closer to them culturally while tourist attractions were photographed more in the further destination, there are other observations that support the fact that cultural closeness can affect travel UGC. In the examples about "People" and tourist attractions, Asians had the biggest fluctuation in numbers depending on the destination. This could suggest that they were more affected by cultural proximity in their posting behavior whereas for Westerners the fluctuation was not big.

While there was no previous literature that compared Asians' and Westerners' UGC and TDIs between two destinations, support for the claim that cultural proximity affects TDI was found. Studies by Kastenholz (2010) and Richardson Crompton (1988, as cited in Kastenholz, 2010) both found that cultural proximity indeed did impact people's TDIs, although in these cases UGC was not the focus of the study in relation to TDI. Richardson and Crompton (1988, as cited in Kastenholz, 2010) went as far as to state that cultural proximity was more important indicator of TDI than other socioeconomic factors, such as income level or educational background.

Based on the samples, natural aspects of a destination, things classified in "Nature & Landscape" and "Plants" categories were present more in photos in the place further in proximity from the home country of the photographer. In other words, Asians had "Nature & Landscape" and "Plants" more in their photos in Paris while Westerners in Bangkok. This could be due to the fact that the local nature of the city one is visiting is more different to where one is from and thus it seems more worth of commemorating. Or perhaps tourists are more likely to notice the diversities of these big cities and recognize that indeed there is nature, not only buildings and urban life. The difference between the cultural groups was the clearest in the case of Bangkok.

While the groups posted about nature more in the more foreign destination, the overall result also suggests that Westerners were more likely than Asians to post photos about natural things. This goes against previous literature's findings. Both Deng et al. (2019) and Stepchenkova et al. (2015) studies about Shanghai and Russia, respectively, concluded that Asians photographed natural aspects of the destinations more. Since neither study compared

two destinations, it is not possible to assess whether their studies would have come to a similar conclusion about cultural proximity and interest in the destination's natural side.

Somewhat interestingly, the opposite trend is true about "Way of Life" than natural aspects of a destination. In the case of "Way of Life", people were more likely to post photos about it in the place closer to their country of origin. This is further supported by Deng et al.'s (2019) research that found that Asians photographed locals and everyday settings more in Shanghai than Westerners. Possibly one is more comfortable taking photos of the local people when they are more familiar with the environment. There is also a higher chance that the photographer is not visiting the destination for the first time and for that reason can focus more on the local lifestyle and people, instead of the "must see" places. The difference of the groups is the clearest in the case of Paris. Perhaps more Westerners that are interested in photographing the local life are drawn to Paris while Asians have different motivations to visit. Asians seemed to be more interested in the attractions there while Westerners wanted to experience and showcase the realities of it and how everyday life there is like.

4.2.6 TDIs

After looking at the numbers from both groups and both cities in the sample, it is possible to study what types of TDIs Asians and Westerners portray of Bangkok and Paris. The differences between the two groups were not drastic but still worth considering. Asians and Westerners in the sample highlighted different aspects in both of the cities which suggests that there are different TDIs of them based on UGC posted by the cultural groups.

"People" was undoubtedly the most common category for both groups in the totality of the results, but it is not included in the discussion about TDIs since it does not really relate to any specific destinations. People tend to photograph themselves a lot during their travels to have memories and moreover, as Instagram was the platform to collect the sample from, photos of "People" are likely even more frequent than in other cases. Instead, the actual aspects of each destination were considered in the overall TDIs portrayed by the posters and are stated in the following paragraphs.

4.2.6.1 Bangkok TDI Through the Asian Lens

Bangkok was portrayed on Instagram in the Asian sample as a destination offering great tourism facilities like hotels and restaurants, heritage sites, specifically highlighting Wat Arun, and culinary experiences. The importance of tourism facilities was really emphasized as it was more

popular to post about than tourist attractions. Showing different types of buildings, modern skyscrapers as well as older houses, streetscapes, and different forms of transportation such as tuk-tuks, buses and river boats contributed to an overall image of the city slightly more than photos of urban landscape without a singular focus. Although there are many parks and places with nature in the Bangkok, they were not posted about in significant amounts giving it a metropolitan feel through and through.

Food was one of the main aspects of Bangkok for Asian people in the sample as it was almost as commonly posted about as the historical tourist attractions. Bangkok was shown as a culinary destination where one can eat in a wide variety of restaurants and street food establishments and based on the photos posted, it seems like people traveled to Bangkok with their main focus being to try and share about the local cuisine. As such, Thai cuisine is almost like an attraction in itself.

The cultural side about art and traditional clothing was not showcased a lot, but they did appear in the photos every once in a while, unlike for Western photographers in Bangkok. Art in general was not paintings but statues which are very common to see in Bangkok.

4.2.6.2 Bangkok TDI Through the Western Lens

How the Westerners depicted Bangkok underlines not only the vastness of the city but also the contrast of this metropolitan city with its heritage and nature. Photos of buildings, transportation and infrastructure showed details in Bangkok that generally differ a lot from Western cities and therefore probably were interesting to the Western photographers. These aspects of the city however were significantly less popular than photos from a bird's-eye-view that underline the size of Bangkok while showing it with less differentiating characteristics. Even though photos of "Urban Landscape" were the most common to post about, after "People", they were closely followed by tourist attractions that are historical and/or religious in nature, like the Grand Palace and Wat Arun. These two categories together appeared in over half of the photos and even standing alone were clearly more popular objects to photograph than the third biggest category, "Tourism Facilities". Westerners mainly showcased their hotels and restaurants they have visited, but they were not in as big role as they were for Asians. Furthermore, images of food were not very popular and only constituted to every tenth photo. Bangkok was not showed as a culinary destination specifically.

Another difference was that Westerners were able to also see the green side of Bangkok, to a certain degree. In fact, "Plants" and "Nature & Landscape" categories put together to portray the natural aspects, were more common to post about than "Food" and Westerners shared more

photos from Bangkok's many parks than Asians. In some of the cases Westerners highlighted the contrast of nature and skyscrapers in the background, which is quite special, particularly for Europeans since there are not many cities that have such juxtapositions. Furthermore, palm trees that are considered exotic in most Western countries were popular to post about. This portrayed Bangkok as a tropical destination.

4.2.6.3 Paris TDI Through the Asian Lens

In Paris, the clear vast majority of photos taken by Asians focused on tourist attractions. The most popular one was indisputably the Eiffel Tower. It is clear that tourist attractions were considered to be the allure of Paris, however, Asians portrayed very one-sided image of them. Besides the Eiffel Tower and Louvre Museum, other attractions were glanced over and did not appear on Instagram almost at all. "Regular building" was the second most common overall topic to show and in fact, even as a subcategory, more popular to post on Instagram about than tourism facilities, art objects or food, which were the following categories by popularity.

Hotels were completely ignored which makes it seem like accommodation options in Paris were not worth mentioning and thus nothing spectacular. Out of the subcategories of "Tourism Facilities", restaurants were the only subcategory with significant number of photos being posted about them. Even still, Paris was not promoted as a culinary destination based on the sample. The natural was shown with photos of parks and plants, while Paris being a big city was almost completely looked over as photos about "Urban Landscape" barely got posted about at all.

4.2.6.4 Paris TDI Through the Western Lens

Tourist attractions and buildings were the two most common topics to post about. Surprisingly however, Westerners did not focus on the Eiffel Tower the most, but regular buildings were the singular most popular overall object. The lack of interest in the Eiffel Tower could perhaps have decreased over the years and Paris is now seen as a city with more diverse attractions. The interest in regular buildings could signal that Westerners in the sample saw Paris' architecture as something special and worth highlighting and though of it as one of the main aspects and characteristics of the city.

In contrast, although "Art Object" was one of the bigger categories for Westerners in Paris, it was only present in quite low number of photos for a destination that is generally seen as a destination for art lovers. Architecture is a form of art in itself, but the TDI of Paris based on

the sample was more of a city you need to enjoy by roaming the streets and sitting in cafes, rather than going to see traditional art in museums. The "local experience" was also shown through photos depicting how the locals live their life in "Way of Life". These candid photos are not typical tourist photos and promoted Paris as an all-compassing experience that goes beyond the surface and touristic attractions. It almost seemed like Western photographers in Paris wanted to feel like one of the locals.

Just like Asians, Westerners also did not post a lot of restaurant and food related content in Paris. They did however highlight Paris' urban landscapes more than Asians which gives an image of Paris being somewhat a big city.

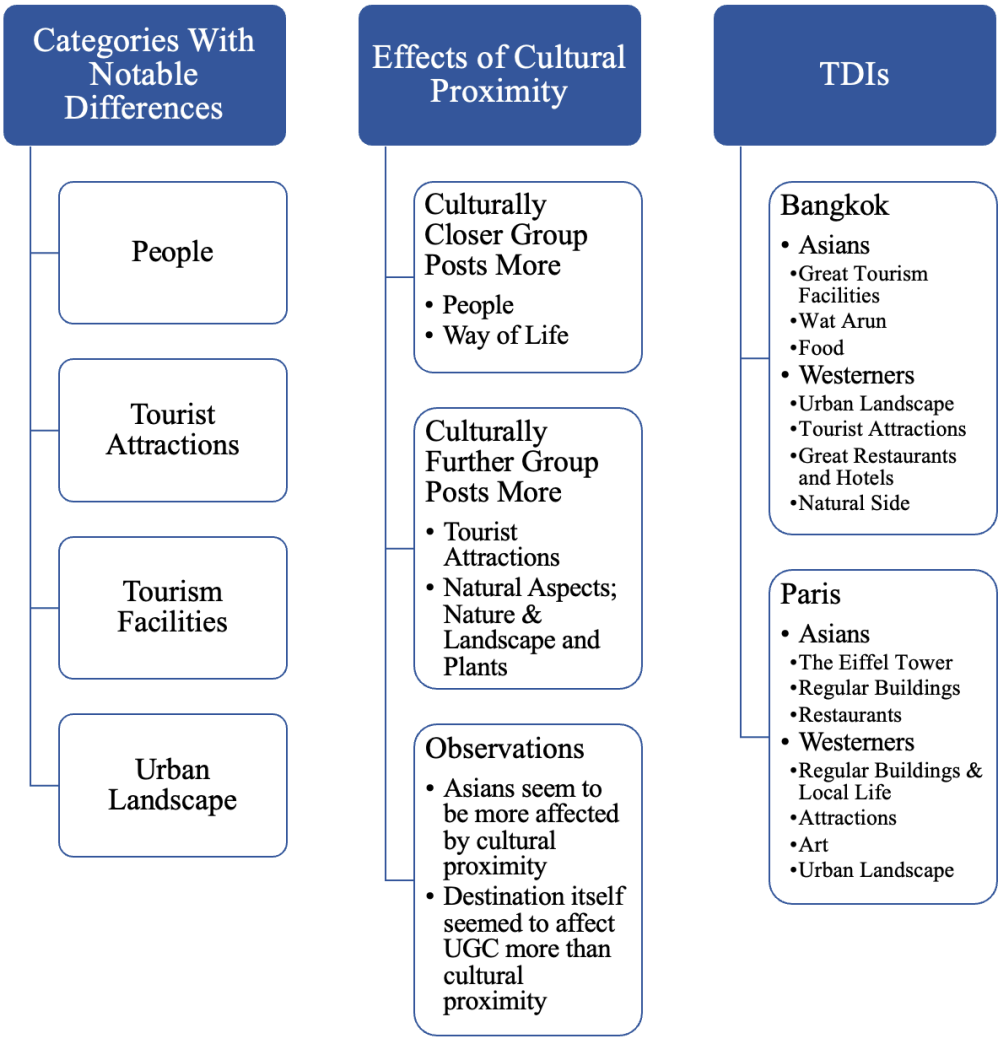


Figure 4.1

Major elements in discussion (Source: own elaboration)

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

5.1 Conclusions

This study aimed to find out how travel user-generated content, UGC, posted by Asians and Westerners differs from each other and how those possible dissimilarities create different tourism destination images, TDIs. In this chapter the key findings of the research will be concluded and discussed in relation to the research questions. In addition, how the findings contribute to the existing literature on TDIs based on UGC and the cultural differences between East and West in relation to them, as well as managerial implications, limitations and suggestions for future research will be considered.

The five most popular categories for Asians in the sample to post about were, in order, “People”, “Architecture/Buildings”, “Tourism Facilities”, “Food” and “Historical & Religious Sites”. For Westerners they were “People”, “Architecture/Buildings”, “Urban Landscape”, “Tourism Facilities” and “Historical & Religious Sites”. While most of the categories were popular for both Asians and Westerners, they had differences in the percentages. Both groups also differed a lot with themselves when comparing the two destinations. Based on the results, Asians and Westerners are more alike each other when posting about the same destination, than with themselves when posting about another destination. This suggests that the destination is more important in determining posting behavior than the cultural group of the poster. However, there were also behaviors that show specific, characteristic posting behaviors for each of the cultural groups.

It was found that Asians emphasized one specific tourist attraction in both destinations, whereas Westerners posted about a wider array of attractions and were in addition more interested in architecture of regular buildings than Asians. What it came to food, Asians preferred pictures about it more than Westerners. Westerners in turn highlighted the grandness of the cities by showing urban landscapes more frequently. Even still, Westerners also posted more about nature. When photographing people, Asians seemed to plan their photos and make them more “Instagrammable”. Westerners instead took more selfies than their Asian counterparts and preferred photos that appeared candid or spontaneous more than polished photos.

Furthermore, the results indicate that there could be couple of posting behavior differences based on the cultural proximity to the destination in question. There was a trend of photographers from both of the groups showing more photos including nature, plants, and tourist attractions in the city further from where they were from. Showing people and local way of life on the other hand was more common in the city one was closer to culturally.

Even though the cultural groups mostly had the same categories in their photos, they highlighted different aspects of the destinations which could suggest that the destinations have different TDIs based on UGC in each cultural group. For example, in Bangkok Asians emphasized tourism facilities, mainly their hotels and restaurants, Wat Arun temple and food. For them tourism facilities were more frequent to post about than tourist attractions. Westerners in contrast posted the most about Bangkok's urban landscape and grandness and a couple of different tourist attractions. They also showed more of the natural side of Bangkok than Asians.

In Paris Asians were clearly the most interested in the Eiffel Tower and it was the focus of every fourth photos. Besides that, they also showed regular buildings, restaurants and art. Westerners were as interested in tourist attractions as they were about regular buildings giving more of a casual feel and showing that Paris as a whole was the main attraction. Art objects were also quite popular for them, but the focus was evidently on architecture and cityscape. Asians barely ever showed bird's eye views of Paris, but Westerners included them as well which gives a feeling of a big metropolitan city.

5.2 Theoretical contribution

Previous literature typically had not used Instagram as a platform to study UGC, and researchers most commonly resulted to analyzing pictures from Flickr in similar studies. Instagram offers a more realistic picture of what general people and not just photograph enthusiasts post on social media about their travels. Moreover, Instagram is likely more influential on shaping people's TDIs as it is part of people's everyday lives and has a lot more active users than Flickr. This is why this research adds something considerable to the study on UGC and TDI.

Based on the literature review, most, if not all, studies comparing Eastern and Western people's travel UGC had selected to study the differences in the case of an Asian city or country and Western locations were not studied. Also, no studies that compared different locations between cultural groups were found. This in return leads to ignoring the potential impact of cultural proximity to what one posts about their travel destination. By comparing Asians' and Westerners' UGC in Bangkok and Paris, more behavioral differences could be realized, and it is possible to see what each group prefers in a city that is more familiar and more foreign to them.

The findings support some of the findings in previous research, such as both groups showing famous touristic sites often and Westerners photographing architecture and residential buildings more than Asians. However, many of the findings are also contradictory. For example, Asians were previously said to have posted about nature and plants more than Westerners. In

this research the finding is the opposite. As the literature in the TDI comparisons created by UGC in the East and West is not broad, it is hard to state whether the results support or oppose previous discoveries. What is certain is that it adds to the understanding of travel UGC behavior and cultural differences between Eastern and Western people and helps shed light into the types of TDIs that are held about Bangkok and Paris by these cultural groups.

5.3 Managerial implications

Based on the results in the research, it is advisable for tourism destination promoters to customize their marketing efforts to match the geographical market they are targeting as TDIs vary. For example, for Asians Bangkok should be highlighted as having great hotels, culinary experiences and the main attraction should be Wat Arun. For Westerners on the other hand, it's the seemingly never-ending skyscrapers and many attractions that should be the focus. In the case of Paris, it should be marketed to Asians by showing the Eiffel Tower, architecture of the city and art pieces, and to Westerners as a place to experience what being Parisian is all about – the streets they walk, the buildings they see the cafes they sit at.

In general, the results suggest that in their travel destination Asians care about the number one tourist attraction, tourism facilities, like hotels and restaurants, and food. Westerners on the contrary are more interested in a wide array of attractions, regular buildings, local lifestyle, and urban landscape. These findings are useful in deciding what the image a tourism board or any other stakeholder wants to portray about any destination. It is important to make targeted promotional materials and not assume that people from different cultures are interested in the same things in their travel destinations.

UGC is shaping people's perceptions about destinations more and more and it is vital that marketers understand how the TDI is shaping up to look like on social media. UGC can be utilized in many ways to benefit the tourism industry. For example, there can be targeted campaigns like asking people from a specific Asian country to post their favorite food in Bangkok using a certain hashtag or a Western market to share their best hidden gems in Paris. Not only would these types of campaigns encourage people to engage and thus also promote the destination or tourism service provider, they actually offer value to people and could increase their intention of visiting the place.

5.4 Limitations and suggestions for future research

There is not a lot of previous literature on travel UGC and its relation to TDIs, and especially not regarding cultural differences between Asian and Western people, so there are some limitations in this research. In this section, they will be discussed and proposals for further research on the topic in the future will be provided.

The results cannot be generalized to the whole population as the sample was collected on Instagram during a specific week and therefore the sample was not collected with a random sampling method. Not everybody uses Instagram and furthermore, only people who had recently been or currently were in one of the destinations could be included. Due to time constraints, a bigger sample, longer sampling period nor studying more destinations were not possible.

Time constraints also impacted methodology. With more time available, it would have been possible to not only collect data from Instagram but also interview people or collect surveys. This way the results could have been supported with more evidence. It would have also been possible to get additional information, such as how many times, if any, one has visited Bangkok or Paris, what type of UGC they have seen about the cities and how they perceive the cities based on peers' or influencers' photos on social media. Moreover, there would have been a clear distinction of who is a tourist and who is a local, a line which was not possible to draw in this research.

Lastly, researcher bias could have an impact on the results. As each photo had to be coded, it was possible to unintentionally be illogical in the classification decisions, miss objects in photos or misinterpret or mistake locations. This could have been solved with having two or more people code all the photos and then compare and discuss the results. However, due to time and budget constraints, only one person was available.

TDIs portrayed by travel UGC and the different posting behaviors between cultures offer many opportunities for future research. First of all, more destinations can be studied to see whether the results follow similar trends or whether facts such as cultural proximity affect the behaviors more than the characters of the destinations themselves. Furthermore, by interviewing or surveying people it would be possible to study attitudes people from different cultures have about destinations and what their visit intentions are due to the UGC they have seen. In this study the affective image about Bangkok and Paris could not be explored. The cities in this study were both urban capitals of their countries. In the future it could be beneficial to study different types of cities and countries as whole to get a more comprehensive understanding of how cultural proximity affects posting behavior. For example, the results

could be very different to those of this result if the locations had been more rural or less well-known or if the whole countries of Thailand and Paris had been under study. A larger sample set could also help see potential differences more clearly.

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Appendix A



Sample of photos from Bangkok.

Upper row taken by Asian people, lower row by Westerners (Source: Instagram)

Appendix B



Sample of photos from Paris.

Upper row taken by Asian people, lower row by Westerners (Source: Instagram)