

TOURISM NETNOGRAPHY: IMPACT OF USER ENGAGEMENT IN YOUTUBE VLOGS ON DESTINATION IMAGE AND INTENTION TO VISIT SIGIRIYA, SRI LANKA.

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ABSTRACT

Social media platforms have become powerful tools in the digital era, influencing travelers' attitudes and plans. This study explored the impact of user engagement with YouTube vlogs on the destination image of Sigiriya, Sri Lanka, and viewers' intentions to visit. Utilizing a netnographic methodology, this research analyzes user comments from the top ten most-watched YouTube travel vlogs about Sigiriya. The primary purpose was to understand how user interactions and discussions within YouTube vlogs shape the destination image of Sigiriya and influence potential tourists' intentions to visit. A qualitative research approach was employed with content analysis as the data analysis technique. Comments on the selected YouTube vlogs were analyzed using NVivo 12 software, focusing on key themes, such as user interaction, emotional response, destination image, and travel intention. The findings revealed that active engagement by YouTube vlog users significantly enhanced the perception of Sigiriya as attractive tourist destinations. Positive comments, shared personal experiences, and lively discussions contribute to a favorable destination image and increase the intention of YouTube users to visit Sigiriya. This study highlights the crucial role of user-generated content in shaping travel behavior and suggests the importance of online interactions in boosting travelers' interest in destinations such as Sigiriya. The implications of the study suggest that tourism stakeholders can utilize social media platforms such as YouTube to foster user engagement, thereby enhancing destination image and encouraging tourism. By strategically engaging with vlog communities, destinations can enhance their visibility and attractiveness to potential visitors.

Keywords: Destination image, travel intention, tourism netnography, user engagement, youtube vlogs